

LUCK AND LUCK

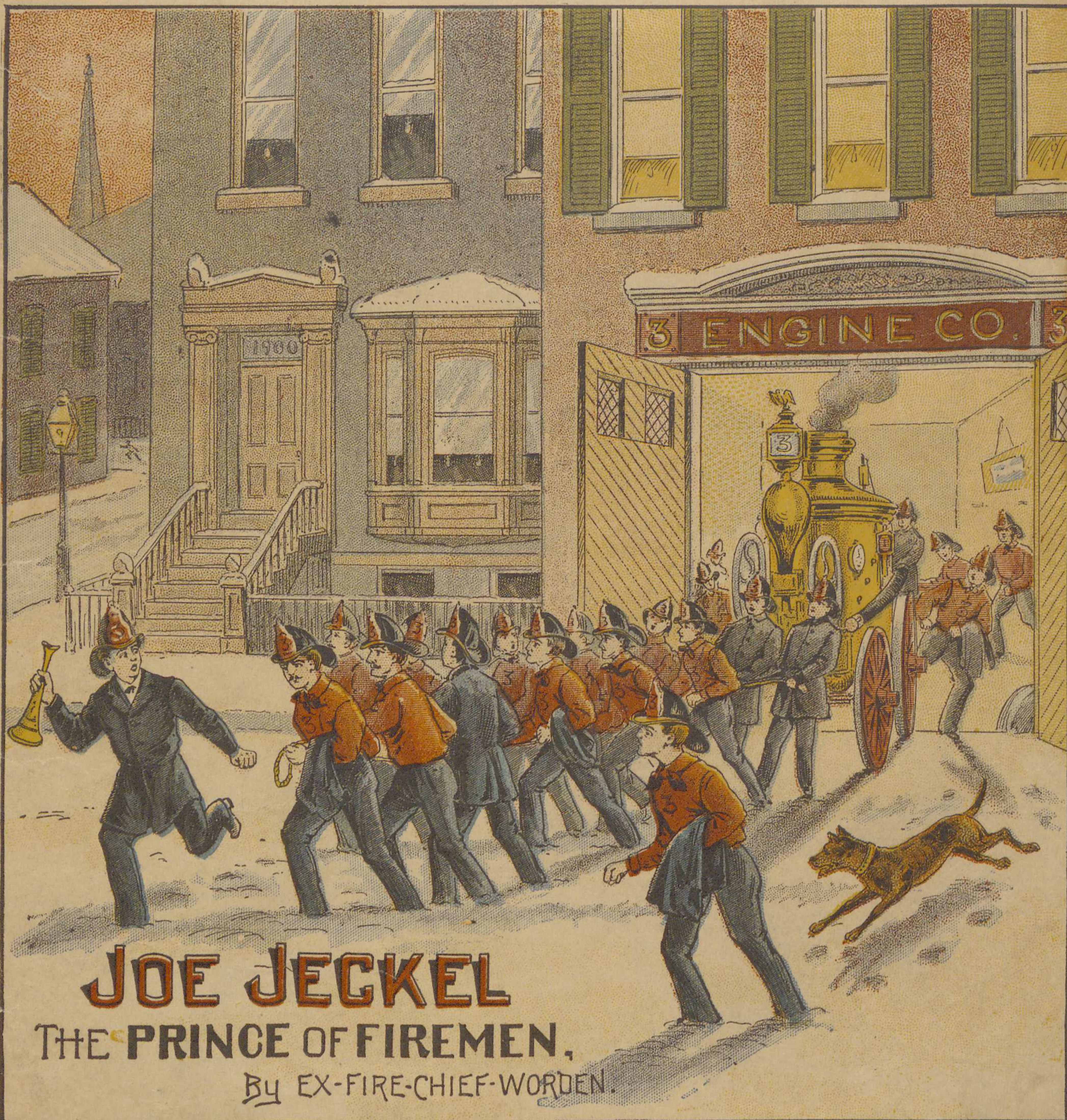
COMPLETE
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Price 5 Cents.



JOE JECKEL

THE PRINCE OF FIREMEN.
By EX-FIRE-CHIEF-WORDEN.

He hurried downstairs to join his comrades. "Go back, Joe! Go back!" cried a score of them at once. "Stay here with the ladies!" "I won't do it!" he replied, seizing his trumpet and rushing out with them.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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JOE JECKEL,

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CHAPTER I.

THE RUNAWAY SLEIGH—THE MAIDEN AND THE FIREMAN.

It was winter in Appleton.

The ground was covered with snow and glittering icicles hung everywhere.

A cold wind had swept through the streets during the day; but after the sun went down it ceased to blow.

The moon shone full and clear, and the icicles sparkled like so many pendent diamonds.

The snow was in splendid condition for sleighing, and nearly everybody who owned or could hire a sleigh had turned out for a moonlight ride.

Hundreds of people of both sexes walked along the wide street through which the merry sleighers dashed to see the fast horses and hear the merry bells and still merrier laughter of young men and maidens.

Now a splendid sleigh belonging to one of the rich nabobs of Appleton would dash by. Murmurs of admiration would follow it. Then some hastily rigged up old family concern, filled with young, light-hearted people, very democratic in style and taste, would come along. Merry laughter and good-humored badinage would greet it. Then would come a light cutter with a couple of rich young lovers, and so on in an endless train.

Suddenly a wild scream was heard up the street, and the sleighs instantly scattered—running up on the sidewalks on either side of the broad way.

A general panic seemed to have seized upon everybody. Women screamed and men appeared to dread some undefined danger that threatened.

A moment or two later a large, powerful iron-gray horse came dashing at full speed down the street. He was a grand picture to look at. His eyes glared and nostrils distended like a war charger in a grand rush of battle. In the sleigh behind him were two ladies. One was standing up and pulling on the reins with all her might. The other was leaning back in the seat making the welkin ring with her screams.

Everybody sought to escape from the pathway of the powerful animal, and he dashed on down the street, threatening destruction to everything in his way. To collide with another sleigh meant death to the ladies and utter demolition of sleighs.

Suddenly a young man was seen to dart out into the middle of the street as if with the intention of stopping the maddened steed.

"Come back! Come back!" cried hundreds in a breath.

But he heeded them not.

On came the splendid iron-gray, making directly for the young man.

People on either side of the street held their breath in awful suspense.

They expected to see a death-dealing accident on the spot, and many of them actually closed their eyes to avoid seeing it.

To the infinite surprise of everybody, the young man did not attempt to seize the bit, and thus try to stop the horse. On the contrary he turned and ran with him, a fact that seemed to add to the maddened animal's terror.

Of course the horse was the swifter runner, and in a moment he had passed the young man. But he was not thus to escape him. The young man caught hold of the sleigh and threw himself into it with the ease and agility of a circus performer.

"Let me have the reins, miss," he said to the lady who had so tenaciously held to them.

She mechanically gave up the reins to him, and then sank back into the seat alongside of her screaming companion.

The young man held the reins with a steady hand and kept the animal in the middle of the street; at the same time he sought to impress upon him the fact that the driver was not afraid of him.

"Oh, do hush, Myra!" urged the lady who had held the reins. "You frighten the horse."

"Save us! Save us! Let me jump out!" the other kept screaming.

"You are in no danger, ma'am," said the young man. "I have him under control."

"Yes—don't you see he has? Look, Myra, the gentleman holds him in hand."

But Myra was nervous and terribly frightened, and it was some time ere she could be induced to stop screaming. The younger of the two ladies seemed to have extraordinary nerve and self-control. She devoted herself to the task of quieting her companion.

"He is quiet now, Myra," she said as she saw that the young man had succeeded in subduing the spirited animal. "Just see how nicely he goes."

"Oh, I shall never trust myself behind him again, Celia!" Myra exclaimed. "We would have been killed if the gentleman had not jumped into the sleigh."

"I never knew him to do so before," returned Celia. "He must have been frightened by something or somebody."

"I shall never feel safe behind him again. 'I've a mind to get out and go home by the street cars.'"

"There is no need of your doing so, ma'am," remarked the young man. "I think you will have no more trouble with him to-night, for he is—whoa, sir!"

"Oh, Heavens! Let me get out! I won't ride another block behind him. Please stop him and let me out!"

The spirited horse had been struck by a snowball, which caused him to shy toward the other side of the street. That gave the elder of the two ladies a finishing scare. She insisted on getting out of the sleigh and being allowed to return home on the street cars.

The young man stopped the horse, and the lady sprang out of the sleigh.

"You had better get out, too, Celia," she said to the other lady. "The gentleman will be so kind as to have the horse sent home for us."

"Certainly, ma'am," he said.

"Oh, that is not necessary, Myra," remarked Celia. "I shall ride home if he breaks my neck—that is, if you will be so kind as to drive him for me."

"With pleasure, miss," the young man said. "I've nothing else to do, and a sleigh-ride on such an evening and behind such a horse would be a rare treat to me, I assure you."

"In that case," Celia said, laughing, "we'll have another dash just to take the wildness out of him."

"Then I shall go home on the cars," Myra said; and then, turning to the young man, she added:

"I am sure that I feel very grateful to you, sir, for your kindness to-night. You ran a very great risk, and I am glad that you were not hurt. My sister Celia will give you our address, if she does not talk you to death."

"Oh, the men can stand a great deal of talking, Myra," remarked Celia. "I never heard of one being talked to death except by one of his own sex."

"I am sure it would be a pleasant death to die," the young man said, "if any death could be pleasant. If I live till I die that way I shall be known as the oldest man that ever lived."

"Well, I hope you will live to bring my sister home at any rate," Myra said, as she turned away to catch a street car.

"My sister is very timid and nervous," said Celia, by way of apology for her sister.

"Yet she has courage enough to go home by herself," replied the gallant youth.

"Oh, yes; and was brave enough to get married once, too. She is a widow now."

"Ah! Is she brave enough to try it the second time?"

"Really, I don't know. She never could persuade me to marry though."

"Oh, it takes a man to persuade a woman to that," was the laughing retort as they went flying up the street. "When the right man comes along you will be persuaded."

"Of course I will, but not till then."

"Sensible—you are only waiting for the right one, then?"

"Yes, I suppose so, though I am not at all anxious about it. I won't have a namby-pamby sort of man about me. I like a man who believes in himself, and has courage and energy about him. Such a man I could love and look up to; but——"

Dong! dong! dong!

"Good Lord!" gasped the young man, suddenly turning the horse around so quickly as to almost upset the sleigh. "There's the fire bell!"

"Do you belong to the fire company?" she asked.

"Yes, and I must run!"

"No—no—don't get out!" she cried. "Drive there as fast as you can!"

"Thanks!" and he started the spirited animal down the street at full speed. He again seemed to be running away. The snow flew from his heels as well as from the runners. Other sleighs quickly turned out of the way to give them plenty of room as well as to avoid danger.

"This is glorious!" exclaimed Celia. "I never experienced anything like it."

The young man made no reply.

He held the horse with a firm hand, and counted the seconds as they flew. To reach the engine house in time to go out with the boys was the one thought uppermost in his mind at the moment. The beautiful woman by his side was almost forgotten.

Down past the engine house of "Appleton No. 1" they dashed.

"You are past the engine house," the young lady cried.

"No—not that one," he said, urging the noble iron-gray to the top of his speed.

The young lady was slightly disappointed.

"Appleton No. 1" was the aristocratic fire company of the city—composed, as it was, of the sons of the rich manufacturers of Appleton.

There were two other companies in the city—No. 2 being made up of the young clerks and salesmen who could not run with the young bloods of No. 1.

No. 3 was run exclusively by mechanics—stalwart young fellows, who earned their bread by hard work in the various workshops of Appleton. The members wore red shirts, and called themselves "The Red Apples."

Down past engine house No. 2 the sleigh dashed, and again the young lady called his attention.

"No. 3—Red Apples," he said, urging the horse to greater speed.

An expression of disgust came into the beautiful face at his side. But the young man did not see it. He was too much engrossed by the crisis before him.

As the engine house was reached he saw the engine just emerging from it, drawn by the boys in red shirts.

"Pardon me, miss," he said to the lady. "Duty before pleasure. I must go to my duty. Your horse has had all the running he wants to-night, and will be only too glad to behave himself. I thank you for the ride."

The next moment he darted away and joined the red-shirted boys, not waiting to hear what she had to say to him about his gallant conduct in saving herself and her sister from a frightful accident.

He dashed into the engine house, threw off his coat, donned a red shirt, seized a speaking trumpet, and sprang away to the head of the gang just as they started on the run.

Away dashed the engine, and the spirited horse attached to the sleigh dashed off after them, as if it had suddenly imbibed the spirit and enthusiasm of the young volunteer firemen.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNRULY HORSE—THE FIRE—INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH—THE
HEROIC FIREMAN'S PERIL.

Away dashed the brave firemen, every man running at the top of his speed.

Close behind them came the sleigh with the beautiful young lady.

The horse ran at his own will, seeming to have no other desire but to keep with the boys.

The young lady, seeing that her horse did not try to dash past or through them, did not try to control him.

But when the firemen turned into another street to reach the fire the spirited iron-gray followed them.

She tugged at the reins to keep him in the main street on which she lived. But he took the bit and dashed after the boys in spite of her.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed, pulling with all her might, "the horse has gone crazy!" and she jerked and pulled till she was red in the face and mad as a hornet.

Away went the "Red Apples," and the iron-gray right after them.

"Oh! what shall I do?" she exclaimed in despair. "I've a mind to jump out and let him go his way."

But she did not.

She was spirited and spunky herself, and did not care to show much feminine weakness when she could avoid it.

The fire was soon reached.

The great crowd of people gave way for the firemen as they dashed up near the building. Hundreds cheered the brave red-shirted fellows, as they promptly prepared to throw a stream of water on the burning building.

The iron-gray pressed up close behind the engine, with a wall of humanity on either side of him.

The presence of the young lady in such a crowd at such a time created a profound sensation.

"Who is she! Who is she?" ran from mouth to mouth, as the sea of eager faces was turned toward her.

At last a gentleman who knew her rushed to the side of the sleigh and exclaimed:

"Why, Miss Atherby! What in the——"

"Oh, Mr. Sinclair!" she cried, on recognizing the gentleman, "I am so glad to see you! Please jump in the sleigh and see if you can't control this unruly horse."

Mr. Sinclair sprang into the sleigh and asked:

"What's the matter with the horse, Miss Atherby?"

"Goodness only knows. I was driving him home when the fire engine dashed by. He took the bit in his teeth and darted after them. In spite of all I could do he kept right up behind the engine."

Mr. Sinclair laughed.

"I'll wager that he once belonged to a fire company," he said as he took the ribbons from her.

"I don't know. It was a mean trick to play me, anyhow, wasn't it?"

"Well, I don't know. Don't you enjoy this scene?"

"Oh, it's horrible! Just look as those poor people trying to escape the flames! Heavens, how I wish I were a man!"

"Here!" cried a stalwart policeman rushing up and seizing the horse by the bit. "What do you mean by coming in here with your sleigh? Get back! Back with you!" and he pushed the horse back savagely.

The sleigh pressed against the people in the rear, and was on the point of being overturned.

"Hold on, officer!" called Mr. Sinclair; "let me explain and——"

"Back, I say! Clear out, or I'll arrest the turnout!"

But the crowd was too thick for a horse and sleigh to move through it other than very slowly.

The policeman would not stop to hear any explanation. He savagely pushed the horse backward, as if trying to upset the sleigh. The spirited animal evidently did not relish such rough treatment, as he tried to shake himself loose. Angered thereat, the brutal officer struck him on the head with his club. That made him wild. He sprang up on his hind feet and pawed the air. One of his heavy feet came down on the officer's head, and sent him to the frozen pavement stunned to insensibility.

Instantly the wildest excitement prevailed. Men and boys rushed wildly hither and thither to get out of the way of the maddened horse. Mr. Sinclair tried in vain to control him, and it seemed as though he would be the death of several people on the spot. A stalwart blacksmith, who knew how to subdue horses, rushed forward and caught the bit.

"It's all right, now," he said. "I've got him. Make way there."

The crowd gave way and the brave blacksmith led him through the pathway that was made for him, while others picked up the wounded policeman.

"Look! Look!" cried the young lady, springing up in the sleigh and pointing toward the burning building. "Oh, Heavens, look at him! God save him and the child!"

While all the trouble with the horse was going on the brave firemen were battling with the flames.

The moment the "Red Apples" reached the fire the young foreman sang out through his trumpet:

"Up with the ladders! Look out for women and children!"

The building was five stories high with two families living on each floor. Women and children were taken from the third story windows—as high as the ladders would reach. Appleton had not the splendid facilities then that she now has for fighting fire.

The first man up the ladder was the young foreman, who, with his trumpet hanging by a cord, was seen diving through a window into a sea of smoke, and presently returning to hand out a young girl to another fireman.

Several were thus rescued, and still others appeared at windows shrieking for help. The crowd below fairly trembled with excitement as they stood in the red glare of the flames.

Suddenly a woman appeared at the window of the floor above the reach of the ladder, and screamed: "Save me! Save my child!" and held a little five-year-old child in her arms.

A groan of both horror and sympathy went up from the crowd below.

The young foreman looked up from the window below and saw the child's dress as she was held by the woman.

"Ben," he said to the fireman on the ladder, "I'll run upstairs and try to save her," and ere the other could utter a protest he was out of sight in the dense smoke that filled the interior of the house.

"My God!" gasped Ben. "The lad will never get out alive! Joe! Joe! Come back! It's no use!"

But Joe did not heed him. He knew the construction of the house, and had made his way direct to the staircase that led to the floors above.

A few moments after Joe disappeared a huge volume of flame and smoke shot out of the window, forcing Ben Burke to descend.

"Joe! Joe! Where is Joe Jeckel?" came up from hundreds of throats.

Ben could only look up at the windows vomiting huge volumes of flame and smoke, and shake his head.

His white face alarmed the other firemen.

The young foreman was a general favorite with the company, and consternation seized upon the members as the truth that he was perishing in the flames flashed through their minds.

A cry of horror went up from the red-shirts, and a half dozen darted up the ladder at once to save or perish with him.

"Come back! Come back!" yelled the others, who saw certain death staring the brave men in the face.

The fierce tongues of flame that shot savagely out of the lower windows defied the brave fellows. They dared not enter.

They stood irresolute on the ladder, one above the other, till the crowd shouted to them:

"Come down! Come down! Too late to save him!"

Another fierce tongue of flame reached out after them. The highest one was almost doubled up by the heat and his desperate efforts to escape it.

Down the ladder they finally went, feeling sure that it was all up with their gallant foreman.

Such was the heat from the burning building that the icicles began to drop from the wires and telegraph poles in front of it.

Where was the gallant fireman during those few anxious moments?

To those below the seconds seemed minutes, and a minute was an hour in their terrible suspense.

He struggled up the stairs to the floor above, and found the rooms densely filled with smoke. The floor was burnt through in several places, and the doors of the partitions were ablaze.

"Where are you?" he called out. "Come to me. I'll save you!"

A woman turned from the window at the sound of his voice and ran toward him, crying, while gasping for breath:

"Save us! Save us!"

He could not see her.

He was blinded by the heat and smoke.

A wild shriek followed, and he heard the woman go down with a crash through a hole burnt in the floor.

Something rolled against his feet.

He felt it struggling.

Stooping, he picked it up and clasped it in his arms.

It was the little five-year-old child the woman had held at the window but a minute before.

"I'll save you or die with you!" he muttered, turning and running toward the stairs with her.

Horrors of horrors!

A dense sluice of red flames was rushing up the staircase.

The whole flight was ablaze.

It would be certain death to attempt to go down in the face of that fiery stream.

"My God!" he gasped. "Retreat is cut off!"

He turned and staggered toward the windows in front.

How he got there he never knew.

Blinded with smoke, and almost roasted alive, he found himself leaning out gasping for air, still holding the child in his arms.

The crowd below caught sight of him. They yelled:

"There he is! Save him! Save him!"

The ladders would not reach to within one story of him. The gallant fireman recognized his peril and saw how helpless they were to aid him.

Yet hundreds yelled at the top of their lungs:

"Save him! Save him!"

The brave firemen tried to splice their ladder so as to reach up to him.

Having caught a breath of fresh air, Jeckel withdrew from the window.

"It's death to us, little one!" he exclaimed, hugging the child to his breast; "but it's better to die by a fall than by fire! God help us!"

He made a rush and sprang out of the window as if shot out of a catapult.

A cry of horror went up from the crowd, and men held their breath in terrible suspense.

He fell across a dozen telegraph wires that ran through the town along that street.

To grasp them with one arm was an instinct, and for several moments he hung that way between heaven and earth, while a shower of icicles rattled on the pavements below. Then, as if assured of a chance for life, he seized the child's dress between his teeth and commenced moving along the wires, hand over hand, toward the nearest telegraph pole.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH—A WOMAN'S ACT.

Men held their breath and their hearts stood still as they watched the perilous progress of the gallant fireman.

It was at this supreme moment that Celia Atherby stood up in her sleigh and cried out to Mr. Sinclair to look.

The beautiful woman was transfixed with horror as she watched the daring fireman holding the innocent child with his teeth while struggling for life with his hands.

"Oh, what a grand hero!" she exclaimed in rapt admiration. "He can save himself by dropping the child. He won't do it. God save him, the hero!"

She hardly knew what she said, so intense was her excitement.

Mr. Sinclair tried to pull her down into the seat to prevent too great exposure to the cold, but she heeded him not.

"Look! Look!" she cried; "they are raising a ladder to the wires. Brave men, save him!"

The ladder was too short to reach the wires, and the firemen lost no time in throwing the long slender one he had used against them.

Two or three minutes elapsed, however, ere it was accomplished. Then Ben Burke hastened up to assist him.

"Give me the child, Joe," said Ben as he reached for her.

The moment the crowd saw the child safe in the arms of Ben Burke a wild cheer went up.

A moment later Joe himself reached the ladder and rested upon it.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Celia Atherby, dropping back into her seat, almost overcome by the intensity of her emotions.

"Hurrah for Jeckel!" cried a voice in the crowd, and a roar like the ocean in a storm followed.

People yelled themselves hoarse as Ben Burke descended the ladder with the child, followed by Joe Jeckel with his clothes half burnt off him.

"Are you hurt, Joe?" the chief of the fire department asked of the young hero.

"Yes—scorched and bruised," was the reply, "but I can stand my ground till the fire is out."

"You had better go out and have your hurt attended to," the chief suggested.

"I'll never leave my post as long as I can stand upon my feet," was the reply.

"Do you think there are any more people in the building?"

"Yes; but they are dead. That child's mother went down through a hole in the floor."

"Poor thing! Whose child is it?"

The women who had escaped the fire said she was the Widow Bigelow's child, Bessie.

"She has no mother," said Joe Jeckel, and all the women set up a wailing, for the gentle widow was beloved by all who knew her.

Little Bessie had so far recovered as to be able to cry for her mother.

Words of sympathy passed from mouth to mouth, and Celia Atherby heard them.

"The child's mother is dead!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Sinclair, you must get me that child. I'll adopt her as my own."

"Miss Atherby!" he ejaculated. "You are unduly excited."

"I mean what I say, Mr. Sinclair. Send for the chief of the firemen and let me tell him myself."

"I'll tell him, lady," exclaimed a man in a rough garb, who was standing near the sleigh. He pushed his way through the crowd and called to the chief. The chief came up to him.

"A lady in a sleigh back there wants to see you about that child," said the man, pointing over his shoulder in the direction of the sleigh.

The chief hastened to see her.

"You wished to see me, ma'am?" he asked as he came up.

"Yes, sir," replied Miss Atherby. "My name is Celia Atherby—one of the owners of the Atherby mills. I hear that the mother of that child was lost in the fire."

"Yes, ma'am. Jeckel says she went through the floor and dropped the child at his feet."

"Brave man! I desire to adopt the child. Send her to my house right away—or give her to me now."

"She may have relatives."

"What if she has? I am better able to care for her than they are. At least, let me have her till they claim her."

The chief knew her as the richest young lady in Appleton. He could make no objection, and so the child was taken to her. She received it in her arms.

"Why, her hair and clothes are scorched! Poor dear! You shall never suffer anything while I have a dollar I can call my own. Officer, can you make these people give way enough for us to get out and go home?"

"I don't know, ma'am," he replied, "but I'll try. Here, get back! More room here! Stand back! Make way there!"

The people crowded forward from the outside so fast that those near the sleigh could not move. Most policemen believe that a club can make a man do almost anything, particularly if he is whacked on the head with it.

Vexed at his inability to clear the way as quickly as he desired, the officer struck a man on the head with his locust, saying:

"Stand back—out of the way!"

"Why do you hit me?" the man asked. "You know I can't push a thousand people back!"

"Don't give me any lip—get back or I'll club the head off of you!" and with that he gave the man another tap on the head.

"Shame! Shame!" hissed a score of voices all around the officer.

"Shame is it!" he yelled in a rage. "Get back!" and he laid furiously about him with his locust.

Men struggled wildly to get out of the reach of his club. They climbed over each other and a scene of indescribable confusion ensued.

Whack! Whack! Whack! went the pitiless club.

"Shame on you, officer!" cried Celia Atherby, in a burst of feminine indignation.

"Slug the cop!" cried some one in the crowd.

Instantly the maddened throng turned on him.

He, strong as a lion, battled against them for a minute or so, and then went down under the blows that rained upon him.

Then the mass of people rushed over him—trampling on him as if he had been nothing more than a board from the burning building.

Celia Atherby was terribly frightened by the din and confusion around her. But she had the courage to stand up and cry out:

"Gentlemen, the poor child is suffering. Let me pass, please."

"Yes! Yes! let them pass!" hundreds shouted, and instantly a general movement ensued. A passage was cleared, and two

men seized the horse's head and led him out of the throng, after which Sinclair drove him very quietly to the home of Miss Atherby.

The fire burned during the greater part of the night, and the firemen had to stay near it to prevent its spreading.

But the injuries he had received in the rescue of little Bessie Bigelow began to tell on Joe Jeckel in about an hour's time. He became so weak and sore that he staggered like one drunk.

"Joe," said the chief, "you are hurt; you must retire," and he sent for another ambulance to take him to the hospital, where several victims of the fire had preceded him.

Once in the ambulance he gave way and sank down like one dead.

"I'm blowed if he isn't dead!" exclaimed the man in charge of the ambulance, the young physician having been left with an injured woman till its return.

The driver whipped up his horse, and soon reached the hospital.

"It's a stiff!" said the driver to one of the physicians.

"Ah! The poor fellow! Let me see!" and he climbed into the ambulance and laid a hand on the fireman's heart.

"Not dead," he said, quickly. "Take him in."

He was carried into the hospital and restoratives promptly administered.

After a little while consciousness returned. Then he was found bruised and burned in many places.

"You got into a hot place," remarked the head surgeon.

"Yes; but I escaped alive, which is more than some others did."

"Were many lost?"

"I don't know, but I am sure of two or three women and children."

"You were in the building?"

"Yes, when one woman went through the floor within a few feet of me."

The surgeon was incredulous.

He thought he was disposed to blow, and so did not ask any more questions just then.

But the next morning when he read the reports of the fire he knew that he had a real hero under his charge.

"The fellow is a hero," he said, "and ought to have a medal for his daring exploit. It was the most daring escape I ever read of."

The surgeon was very social with him when he paid him a visit after breakfast.

"You have lost your mustache," Mr. Jeckel, he said, as he seated himself by his cot.

"Yes, but I don't mind. I can spare that, as it will grow again."

"How do you feel this morning?"

"Sore all over."

"You will soon get over that, as no bones were broken. You have no fever. You are a lucky man."

"Have you seen the morning papers, doctor?" Joe asked.

"Yes."

"How many were lost?"

"Some three or four women—just as you said last night."

"Poor things! I did my best to get them all out," and his eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

The doctor was touched.

The young hero had a heart as tender as a woman's.

"I came very near not getting there at all, doctor," he said.

"How so?"

"Because I was some two miles away when I heard the bell, in a sleigh with a lady whose horse had run away with her. She allowed me to drive back to the engine house, where I sprang out and left her."

"Who was the lady?"

"I don't know. She did not tell me her name, and I forgot to ask."

The doctor smiled.

"Was she handsome?"

"Yes, very."

"Well, I should have made her acquaintance by all means," said the doctor.

An hour later the doctor came to him and said that the lady who had taken little Bessie Bigelow desired to see him.

"Let her come in," he said.

Miss Celia Atherby was led into the room by the surgeon, who said:

"Miss Atherby."

"I am glad to see you are not worse hurt than—oh, Heavens!"

She stopped short, staggered backward, and would have fallen to the floor had not the surgeon caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG FIREMAN AND THE LADY.

When the lady uttered the exclamation and fell backward into the surgeon's arms, a similar ejaculation burst from the young fireman's lips.

He raised himself on his elbow and stared at her with wide-open eyes. She returned his gaze, scanning every feature of his scorched face, as if in search of some particular lineament or expression. He was the first to speak.

"We have met before," he said.

"Yes," she answered, looking him straight in the face, "and all the time I didn't know it was you."

The surgeon, who was well acquainted with Miss Atherby, was amazed. He scented a romance, and said:

"Ah! I see that you two are acquainted. I will leave you to yourselves," and he started to leave the ward.

"Stay, doctor," said Miss Atherby, looking up from the chair in which he had seated her. "I never met Mr. Jeckel till last night, when he did me a great service at the risk of his life!"

"Ah! were you in that burning building?" the surgeon asked.

"No. I was in my sleigh—my sister and I. The horse took fright and ran away with us. He was tearing furiously down the street when this young gentleman sprang into the sleigh as it whizzed past him, took the reins from me and soon had the restive animal under control."

"That was, indeed, a gallant action," remarked the surgeon, looking from the beautiful woman to the young hero on the cot.

"Yes, it was. Myra was so nervous, however, that she would not ride behind the horse another block after he was stopped. She insisted on getting out and returning home on the street cars. Mr. Jeckel, whose name we did not then know, said he would drive me home. But long before we reached home the fire alarm sounded. Mr. Jeckel turned the horse's head in the direction of his engine house, and drove like Jehu, explaining on the way that he was a fireman and had to be on hand at the fire."

"Of course," said the surgeon, who was getting interested in the story.

"When he reached the engine house he apologized for leaving me, sprang out and ran into the company room and I lost sight of him. In another moment the engine burst out of the engine house and rushed off down the street. My horse dashed off after them at full speed. I did not care so long as he could not pass them, and so let him go. He ran right up behind them, as if he wanted to join the company. When the engine turned into Bowles street he followed. I tried hard to keep

him on the way homeward, but could do nothing with him. He was right up to the fire in spite of all I could do. I was thus hemmed in by the great crowd of people and could not get out. It was a strange adventure, wasn't it? I was forced to sit there and witness that horrid scene for more than an hour, not dreaming that the brave young man who so gallantly saved little Bessie Bigelow's life was the hero of the runaway sleigh."

Joe blushed like a schoolgirl and said:

"Your horse must have belonged to a fire company once."

"I don't know. He is a very fine and very spirited animal. I never knew him to act so before, and am going to find out his antecedents. It looks as if Providence ordered the occurrence in the interest of little Bessie."

"How is the child?" Joe asked.

"She is burned in a few places. The doctor says she is not much hurt. She cries a good deal for her mamma, though. I thought you would like to hear from her, and that is why I came. Of course I wished to see and thank the hero, not dreaming that you were my hero also. Myra will be ever so much surprised when I tell her."

Joe again blushed like a schoolgirl. He couldn't help it, for he knew that she was the owner of the famous Atherby mills in Appleton, the richest lady in the city. She was not a young simpering miss of eighteen or twenty, but a mature woman of eight and twenty, the leader of society. He had never seen her before the runaway sleigh incident; but everybody in Appleton knew all about the owner of the Atherby mills.

As the reader has doubtless perceived, she was a great talker. She rattled along at a great rate, and was so entertaining that the surgeon forgot all about his professional duties in listening to her.

Suddenly she turned to him and asked:

"Doctor, am I talking too much to your patient?"

"Of course," he replied. "He'll be a dead man in another hour if you don't let up," and the surgeon winked at the young fireman as he spoke.

"Don't you believe a word of that, Miss Atherby," said Joe. "Your talking will do me more good than all the medicine in the hospital, doctors included."

"Ah, did you hear that, doctor? I have my revenge," and her silvery laugh rang through the ward clear as a bell.

"My treatment has certainly restored his natural impudence," retorted the surgeon, "for he was half dead when brought here last night."

"That's true," admitted Joe. "I'll stand by you, doctor."

"Ah, it's like you to stand by one in distress. I have a weakness that way myself, so I won't talk any more. Take good care of the hero, doctor, for I want little Bessie to see and know him when he gets up again. Good-by, Mr. Jeckel. I hope you will soon be free from pain," and then, without waiting to hear the words of thanks that Joe uttered, she turned and flitted out of the room, followed by the surgeon.

"She's an angel," murmured Joe, turning over on his side, closing his eyes and giving way to his thoughts.

The surgeon saw her out to her carriage, where she turned to him and said:

"Take good care of him, doctor. He is the prince of firemen."

"He is, indeed," the surgeon said. "I shall give him all the attention his case calls for. His injuries are more painful than dangerous, however."

"I am glad to hear that. He is the bravest man I ever saw," and she entered her carriage and drove away.

The surgeon gazed after the carriage till it was out of sight. Then he turned away, murmuring:

"She is as good as she is beautiful. This is not the first time she has done such things. There are many poor people in Appleton whom she has befriended. Strange she has never

married. She must have met with a disappointment in her girlhood days, and remained single on that account. What a fortune she could bring her husband!"

The surgeon went back to his professional duties. He had much to do as well as think of. The hours flew by so fast that the day was nearly gone ere he was aware of it. He had seen the young fireman but once since the lady left that morning. Hastening into the ward where he lay, he asked:

"How do you feel now, Joe?"

"All broke up, doctor," was the reply.

"Quite sore, eh?"

"Yes, all over. Didn't know I was so badly hurt."

"You feel quite comfortable about the region of the heart, eh, don't you?"

Joe looked up at him in a wondering sort of way.

"Been dreaming of your beautiful visitor of this morning, eh?" the surgeon asked.

"Oh, I understand you now," and the young hero laughed. "No, I haven't dreamed about her. She's a daisy, though, isn't she."

"A splendid woman, Joe," and the doctor felt his pulse and looked at some of his hurts. "You ought to try to make an impression on her while she is interested in you."

"Bah!" said Joe. "Why should I make a fool of myself and lose her good opinion? I am a poor mechanic—one of the 'Red Apples.' Give her a love powder, and capture her yourself, doctor."

The surgeon laughed; but to himself he thought that he would only be too glad to follow Joe's suggestion were it possible to do so.

An attendant came in and beckoned to the surgeon, who followed him out of the room.

"There's an officer in the office to see you, doctor," remarked the attendant.

The surgeon hastened into the reception room of the hospital and there found a constable accompanied by a well-known old miser by the name of Seegar.

"Doctor," said the constable, as the surgeon entered the room, "I have a warrant to search the clothes of Joe Jeckel, and arrest him if appearances warrant."

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD MISER AND THE YOUNG FIREMAN.

Let us again revert to the fire where young Jeckel became such a hero in the eyes of the good people of Appleton. The reader will no doubt remember the fact that quite a number of lives were saved by the gallant firemen. Men, woman and children were carried out as fast as found. Some of them were so terror-stricken as to be almost unmanageable.

At the time when the place had become too hot almost to allow any more searching for occupants, Joe Jeckel and one of the members of "Appleton Fire Company No. 1," the aristocratic company of the town, met in the corridor on the third floor. The smoke was too dense for them to recognize each other, except by their voices.

An old man staggered out of a room against them, groaning and gasping for breath.

"My God!" he gasped, "I—I can't hold out! I—am—ruined!"

"I'll take you out!" cried Dick Averil, seizing the old man in his arms and rushing down the corridor toward the head of the stairs with him.

"No—no—my box—my box—my diamonds!" shrieked the old man, struggling desperately to free himself from Averil's grasp.

"Go on—I'll get your box!" cried Joe. "Take him out, mate!"

Joe did not know Averil, but the other recognized Joe's voice, and said:

"All right. I've got him!" and in another moment he went tumbling downstairs with the old man, who kept yelling:

"My box—my box! Let me get my box!"

Dick Averil held on to him and succeeded in landing him out on the sidewalk. There the old miser got away from him and made an effort to run back into the burning building.

"Catch him! Stop him!" cried a dozen at once. He was seized and dragged out of the reach of danger, and turned over to the police. He kept groaning and wringing his hands, crying out:

"My box! My box! I am ruined! Save my box, my box!"

"The old rascal has a box full of money in his room!" said a bystander, who knew the old miser.

"Joe Jeckel will get your box," said a man who knew that Joe was still in the building.

Jeckel did search for the box, but the smoke in the room became so dense that he was forced to rush to the window for a breath of fresh air. It was then he heard the cry of the woman at the window of the room overhead. He looked up and saw the child the woman held in her arms.

All thoughts of the box flitted from his mind. A woman was in danger of perishing in the flames. He dashed out of the room and made his way upstairs. The reader knows what followed. The child was saved, but the mother perished.

The old man who was so inconsolable about his box, was named Seegar. He was a miser who owned a great deal of property in the town and was supposed to have a box full of precious stones in his apartment. He was never known to refuse to buy a precious stone whenever he could get it below its value.

So frantic did the old miser become when he saw Joe Jeckel spring from the window with a child, instead of his box, in his arms, that the police were compelled to take him to the station-house to prevent him from rushing into the burning building. He raved like a madman, tore his hair and accused the firemen of robbing him.

The next day after the fire a rigid search was made in the ashes. Not a single diamond could be found. Jewelers said that heat could not destroy them.

"They were stolen! They have robbed me!" the old man frantically exclaimed.

Dick Averil was called upon to tell what occurred when he seized the old man to bear him out of the building. He hated the "Red Apples" because they had borne off all the honors of the occasion. The young aristocrats could not match the sturdy mechanics in physical strength and courage, and so were not more than barely mentioned in the papers in their accounts of the fire.

He said that he left Joe Jeckel near the door of the old miser's room, and heard him say he would look after the box.

"Yes!" exclaimed the old man, "I heard him, too. He got my diamonds. I am going to have 'em or his heart's blood!"

The "Appletons" winked at one another and whispered around that "loot" was the affection that caused the "Red Apples" to dash so recklessly through the flames to get into the rooms.

"I'd have him arrested," said one of them to the old miser.

The old man tried to get a warrant for Joe's arrest, but failed. But he did succeed in getting a search warrant.

With that he went to the hospital, accompanied by a constable.

The surgeon was thunderstruck when the constable showed him the warrant. He looked at the paper and then at the old miser.

"You are a brave man to do that, Mr. Seegar," he said. "I

wouldn't have sworn out that warrant under the circumstances for ten thousand dollars."

"I lost more than that, doctor," replied the miser, "all through those meddling firemen. Had they let me alone I would have saved my box. If I don't find the diamonds in his pocket I'll sue the city for them. Yes, I will. The city is responsible for her firemen. Has anybody meddled with his clothes since he was brought here last night?"

"No," replied the disgusted surgeon, "you will find him in Ward No. 3, constable."

The constable and the old miser followed an attendant into the room where the young hero was lying. His face was so burned that they did not recognize him at first.

"That is Mr. Jeckel," said the attendant, pointing to Joe's cot.

"Ah! You are Joe Jeckel, are you?" Seegar asked, turning with a nervous haste to the young fireman.

"Yes, that's my name," replied Joe, "and you are Mr. Seegar."

"Yes—now tell me where my diamonds are you took out of my box in my room last night?"

Joe looked at the old miser like one in a daze.

"I've got a warrant for you," said the miser. "You can't escape. Where are those stones?"

"I have a search warrant here, Mr. Jeckel," said the constable, "which instructs me to search your effects for——"

"Great God!" gasped Joe, raising himself on one elbow. "Does the old scoundrel dare accuse me of stealing anything from him?"

"Yes—yes I do!" exclaimed the old man, dancing round the room in his nervous excitement. "Search him—search his clothes, officer. He was in the room. He said he would get the box! I heard him say it!"

"I have to do my duty, sir," said the officer.

"Yes, of course—do it," replied Joe, and then he turned his gaze on the old miser. That miserable specimen of humanity dared not look him in the face while the constable was searching the young fireman's clothes.

Of course nothing was found. The constable turned to the old miser and said:

"I told you he was a square man. There's nothing about his clothes your warrant calls for."

The old man's eyes glared.

To lose his hoarded treasure would utterly crush the little heart he had in him.

"Search the bed! Search the bed!" he whined. "He is the only one who could have taken them!"

"Search the bed," said Joe, leaping up off the cot.

The constable did search the bed, and found nothing.

"What do you find?" Joe asked.

"Nothing whatever," was the reply.

"Well, let me search a little bit," said Joe, walking over toward the miser as if he merely designed walking round to the other side of the cot. The moment he got within reach of Seegar he caught him by the throat and rained a half dozen blows on his face so quickly that the constable had no time to see him.

"Murder! Murder!" yelled the old villain. "I am killed!"

Joe released him and he fell to the floor stunned almost to insensibility.

Half the attendants in the hospital heard the cry, and rushed into the room.

They found the old miser feeling himself and declaring that he was killed.

His nose was mashed out of all shape and both eyes were rapidly closing. He looked as though he had tackled a threshing machine.

"What's the matter here?" asked the head surgeon, coming in at the moment.

"I've been murdered!" cried the old miser.

"Who murdered you?"

"Jeckel—that man there!" and he pointed to the young man who was now snugly ensconced between the sheets.

"What! That sick man!" exclaimed the surgeon. "Why, he could not hurt a flea. You are out of your head, old man."

"My God, constable!" gasped the old rascal, "why don't you arrest him?"

"What for? I didn't see him do anything," and the constable winked at the young fireman.

"You didn't?"

"No."

The old villain saw that he was in the company of men who would not side with him. Clenching his fist and shaking it at the young man on the cot, he hissed:

"You struck me. I am an old man. They call me a miser. Maybe I am. I love money. But I love revenge more. I'll make you rue the day you ever struck old Solomon Seegar!"

The surgeon was about to interrupt him, but he suddenly turned and fled from the room. In another moment he was hastening down the street in the direction of a magistrate's office.

"Did you strike him, Jeckel?" the surgeon asked of his patient.

"Did you see me strike him, doctor?" Jeckel asked.

"No, I was not in the room."

"Well, then, that's all you know about it."

"That's so," remarked the doctor, smiling. "He can't make a witness of me."

"Nor of me, either," said the constable.

"The old scoundrel!" muttered Joe. "Had I been up all right I would have broken half the bones in his body. Somebody put him up to that trick. I never saw his box at all. The room was too full of smoke for anything to be seen. Why, the old rascal was half dead, gasping for breath, when Dick Averil and I found him. I heard him cry out something about his box, and I told him I would look for it, which I did. I might have found it, if little Bessie and her mother had not been in danger."

"Yes, yes," said the surgeon, "we can all understand that. Nobody would believe such a thing of you, Jeckel."

"Well, I hope not. But, you see, it makes me mad as a hornet to have it go out that a warrant was issued to search my effects. Oh, I'll get even with the old villain yet."

"Well, don't get excited. Keep cool and you may escape having a fever from your hurts. You had better leave him now, constable."

"I will do so," said the officer, "and return this warrant with the indorsement that it should not have been issued," and he took leave of Joe and the surgeon in a way that convinced them that he was as indignant as they were about the conduct of the old miser.

Joe then quieted down, but he did not succeed in dismissing the incident from his mind. It preyed upon him in spite of all he could do. He was satisfied that some one else was behind the old miser in the matter.

"I'll trace it up when I get out of this," he muttered, "for I would rather be a dead man than a suspected live one."

CHAPTER VI.

JOE ESCAPES TO A FIRE.

It soon became known to everybody in Appleton that the old miser had accused Joe Jeckel of robbing him of diamonds during the fire. Nobody believed the charge. When it became known that the gallant young hero had sprung from his bed

of pain and given his accuser a terrible thrashing, everybody smiled and chuckled.

"He's the boy that can take care of himself in any kind of a fire," remarked Ben Burke, the young foreman's right-hand man.

"So he is," assented Jack Adams, "but he can't knock the law out. I saw old Seegar, and his face is awful. The court will be down on Joe for it. We must see the old rascal and reason with him."

"Reason with him?"

"Yes."

"Reason with a miser or pawnbroker? You don't know the tribe, Jack."

"I think I do, Ben. I've heard of men out West reasoning with a man, and that he was very easily convinced."

Ben looked at Jack, and Jack returned his gaze. Then they both smiled.

"I tumble, Jack," said Ben. "We'll go and reason with him any time you say."

"Say to-night, then."

"All right. Where shall we find him?"

"Oh, I don't know. If we say we wish to see him about his diamonds, he'll turn up and give us a chance to give him a little chin music."

They went hunting for the old miser that night, and found that he had taken lodgings with one of his tenants on a little back street. As first he refused to see them, as his head and face were bandaged so as to render him almost unrecognizable.

But Jack sent down in to him that they were two firemen who had called to see him about his lost diamonds.

That woke him up at once, and he ordered the girl to let them come up to his room.

They entered and Ben closed the door.

"You are firemen?" he asked.

"Yes—we belong to the 'Red Apples,'" was the reply.

"They are a hard set."

"So I have heard. You accuse one of our company. Did you see him take the diamonds?"

"No."

"Did you see him in your room?"

"No."

"You only heard him say he would get your box?"

"Yes; he said he would, and the crowd saw him at the window of my room. The property cannot be found in the ashes, and he was the last man in the room."

"Millions of property disappear in flames every year, old man. Joe had the right to be in your room at that time, as you well know. Every fireman has that right during a fire. No wonder he gave you a thrashing. He risked his life to save you and others, and after doing so is accused of stealing."

The old miser was dumbfounded by such talk, and asked:

"What do you know about my property that was lost?"

"Not a blessed thing," said Jack. "We came here to tell you that the entire company of 'Red Apples' mean to hang you to a lamp-post if you don't do Joe Jeckel justice in this thing."

"Eh? What?" gasped the old miser, his eyes nearly starting out of their sockets.

"I mean just what I say. If you don't do justice to Joe Jeckel we'll hang you to a lamp-post some night."

"That's blackmail! I'll send both of you to state's prison for that," said the old man in a tearing passion.

"You will, eh? Well, suppose you try it on, old man. Ben and I will swear you sent for us and tried to bribe us to say we saw Joe with your diamonds. Why, you old son of sin, we'd land you right in Sing Sing! Say, don't you try to buck against the 'Red Apples.' They are too hard for you, and your teeth are not good. We stand by one another through thick and thin. Do you tumble?"

The old miser was a picture of utter amazement. He was

utterly speechless. The cool cheek of Jack was too much for him. It broke him all up. He saw that they could beat him if he resorted to the law. He had had experience enough in life to know that.

"Do you drop, old man?" Jack asked him again.

"Yes—you may go," was the reply.

"Oh, we don't go till we know what you are going to do," said the young fireman, with a very determined air.

"I won't bother your friend," was all the old miser said.

"That's all right," and Jack and Ben turned on their heels and left the room.

But ere they started to descend the stairs they heard his voice calling them back.

"Come back! Come back!" he called, and they returned to see what he wanted.

They stood near the door and waited for him to speak.

"My diamonds!" he moaned. "My diamonds! Where are they?"

"Hang you and your diamonds!" blurted Jack. "What do we know about them? Come on, Ben."

They turned and left the old miser to nurse his wrath and mourn his loss.

"They have robbed me!" hissed the old miser through his bloodless lips. "They have robbed me! Those firemen have got my precious diamonds divided among themselves. That's why they try to scare me out of prosecuting the rascal who took them. I won't submit to it. I'll have the diamonds or revenge! Ha! ha! ha! I love money, but revenge soothes my soul! I'll make 'em rue the day they were born!"

All unconscious of the visit of his two friends to the old miser, Joe Jeckel, the gallant young fireman, lay on his cot in the hospital, recovering from the wounds he had received in the last fire. Being blessed with good health, a strong constitution and sanguine temperament, he grew better very fast.

Within twenty-four hours after his entrance to the hospital his room was stacked with flowers, sent from hot-houses by scores of ladies who admired his daring spirit. So many bouquets accumulated, that the fragrance emitted almost suffocated those in the room. The surgeon ordered them removed and forbade any more being brought in to stay.

But Joe recovered rapidly, though the burns were quite painful.

"I'll let you out in a week," said the surgeon in the evening of the fourth day.

"Feet foremost?" Joe asked.

"No—I'll fire you out head first," replied the surgeon, laughing.

A few hours before a heavy snow storm swept over Appleton, leaving over a foot of snow in the streets. When it ceased the thermometer went down almost to zero. The snow was piled upon the curbstones as high as a man's head.

The surgeon told Joe of the great fall of snow, and asked if he would not like another sleigh-ride like the one he enjoyed on the night of the fire.

"Yes," was the reply. "But I am not in trim for it."

"Oh, there's snow enough to last a month, though not another flake should fall."

Just then the surgeon was called out by a messenger sent in from the office, and he left the patient saying:

"I will return again soon."

A few minutes after the surgeon left him Joe began trying to doze off into a nap. He was about half asleep when an alarm from the great fire bell startled him.

He sprang up in his bed, about half awake, and counted:

"One—two—three—four!"

"Fourth District!" he exclaimed, and utterly forgetting that he was on a sick bed in the hospital, he leaped from the bed, hurried on his clothes and rushed for the door.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed one of the burly attendants of

the institution. "You shall not go, Mr. Jeckel! Doctor! Doctor!"

"Out of my way!" cried Joe.

"No—you shall not go! You are crazy, man!" and the stalwart attendant blocked the door so completely that Joe saw how utterly useless it would be to attempt to pass him.

He heard the surgeons and others running forward in response to the man's call. He would soon be overpowered and held so as to prevent his going out.

Glancing at one of the windows at the end of the room, Joe made a dash toward it.

An exclamation burst from the attendant, who rushed after him.

He had no time to open the window, so he sprang through, utterly demolishing it.

Picking himself up outside he dashed down the street at the top of his speed.

The engine house was not very far away; but the brave boys were running out with the machine when he reached it.

Ben Burke was the first to recognize him.

He was dumbfounded at seeing him there.

"Boys!" he cried out, "here's Joe, our prince of firemen!"

The red-shirts instantly grew wild with enthusiasm.

Ben and a half dozen others seized and placed him up on the engine.

"Ride to the fire," cried Ben. Then, placing the trumpet in his hands, added:

"Give your orders."

"Off with her, boys!" he sang out through the trumpet. "Be the first on the spot."

Away they dashed, the rough "Red Apples," yelling at every step.

"There goes the 'Red Apples!'" cried hundreds of voices on either side of the street.

"Joe Jeckel! Joe Jeckel!" cried the red-shirts as they dashed up to the fire about half a minute ahead of the others.

Joe leaped to the ground and was recognized by the crowd, who were astonished at seeing the young hero, whom they believed to be in the hospital badly hurt. They set up a yell of welcome and encouragement.

"Up with the ladder!" came through his trumpet, and the ladder went up.

"Throw on the water!"

The stream of water began to play on the flames.

Women and children were brought down, and when no more were believed to be inside, a child's voice was heard at one of the windows.

Joe sprang up the ladder with the agility of a squirrel, and in another moment disappeared through the window.

The whole front of the house was ablaze. It was like plunging into a fiery furnace, like Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, and the crowd below thought he had gone mad.

"He's lost! He's lost this time!" cried hundreds, as the flames shot out of a window and lapped the long, slender ladder till it bent and fell.

"Oh, God! Look there!" gasped the crowd, as the daring young fireman sprang out of the high window, and came whizzing down through the air into an immense snow bank on the curbing.

one bearing an innocent child down to certain death with him is tenfold more horrifying.

As the brave fireman came down through the air, as if to certain destruction, a cry of horror went up from the crowd. The picture was blood-curdling and dramatic.

Behind him were the hissing, crackling, writhing flames. Below were the hard stone pavements, and huge piles of snow on the curbing.

From the time he sprang from the burning building till he struck in the snow-mound, not a man in the shivering multitude breathed. Every man held his breath in harrowing suspense. And when he fell into the snow-bank a groan burst involuntarily from hundreds.

They believed both he and the child to be crushed beyond recognition by the fall.

A half dozen firemen rushed forward to pick him up ere half the snow displaced by the crash had fallen elsewhere. Both were quite stunned by the fall. When they were picked up they were more or less dazed.

"Joe, old man," cried Ben Burke, who was the first to lay hands on him. "Are you hurt? How is it? Speak up, old man!" and he shook him quite roughly.

Joe looked around him in a dazed sort of way, as if stunned by a hard blow on the head.

They dragged him out, and Jack Adams picked the child up out of the snow-bank more dead than alive.

"Is he dead? How is he?" came from hundreds of excited people, all of whom tried to get near enough to see for themselves.

"Get back! Get back!" cried the police, using their clubs with unwonted freedom on the heads of the crowd.

"Joe, old man!" called Ben Burke, as he bore the young hero away from the snow-bank, "are you hurt?"

"Eh?" was all he could say in reply.

"Are you hurt? Speak up, old man. The fire hasn't got you yet. All right, are you?"

"All right," said Joe, half unconsciously.

"He says he's all right, boys!" cried Jack Adams, in a loud voice, to his comrades.

A wild shout went up from the "Red Apples." They were wild with delight.

Appleton No. 1 did not cheer.

The mechanics had again beaten them and borne off all the honors of the occasion. The young bloods of the more aristocratic company could not compete with such brawn and muscle. They maintained a sullen silence, but worked at their engine with commendable faithfulness.

Just a minute of two after Ben Burke bore him out of the crowd and away from the vicinity of the fire, an ambulance from the hospital drove up. The surgeon sprang out and asked:

"Who is hurt?"

"Joe Jeckel and a child," was the reply.

"What! Joe hurt again? He escaped from us like a lunatic leaping through a window to get away when he heard the fire alarm."

By this time Joe was sufficiently recovered to know where he was.

He recognized the doctor and said:

"Give me a lift, doctor; I am all broke up."

"Ah! I am not surprised at that. We are thinking of putting you in a strait-jacket."

"Let it be a red one, doc," he said. "I'm a 'Red Apple,' you know."

The firemen yelled themselves hoarse over the reply of their daring young foreman. The remark passed in the crowd, from mouth to mouth, and shouts went up for the gallant fireman.

On the way back to the hospital a great crowd escorted the

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER AND CHILD IN THE HOSPITAL.

The sight of a man falling through the air thirty or forty feet is an appalling one under any circumstances. But to see

ambulance. The plaintive cries of the child, who was badly hurt, drew tears from hundreds.

"What's your name, little girl?" the surgeon asked.

But the child cried so she could make no reply, and so she was carried along to the hospital with the brave fireman who came so near losing his life with her.

Ere the child was placed in bed, however, a woman came running into the office of the hospital frantically crying:

"My child! My little Effie! Where is she? They said she had been brought here!"

The mother's voice rang through the hospital, and the child in another room upstairs heard it. She raised her little head and looked up at the doctor.

"Mamma! Mamma!" she called, quite feebly. "Where is mamma?"

"Go down and see if that is her mother," the doctor said to his assistant.

The assistant ran down into the office and there found the mother wringing her hands and crying for her child.

"Come upstairs," he said to her, "and you can see your child. But you must calm yourself. It won't do to excite her in the least."

"I am calm now," the mother said, making a desperate effort to appear so. The assistant saw that it was only an enforced calmness, and said:

"You are still very much excited, madam. To excite your child might kill her. Can you keep cool and speak cheerfully to her?"

"Yes, sir—though it should kill me the next moment!"

Such is a mother's love!

"Then come up with me," he said.

She followed him upstairs and into the room where the little sufferer lay on the pillows.

"Mamma!" said the child, as her eyes caught sight of her mother.

"Mamma is here, darling," said the mother, in tones so quiet and steady as to challenge the admiration of the surgeons. Then she leaned over and kissed the little face a dozen times.

Little Effie seemed perfectly satisfied now she had her mother with her. The mother looked wistfully at the little pale face, and then up at the surgeons.

"Tell me all, doctor," she whispered. "Suspense will kill me."

"I can tell you nothing, madam," he replied. "We were about to make an examination when she heard your voice downstairs and called for you."

"My darling!" sobbed the mother, her eyes filling with tears, while a great lump crept up in her throat.

"Keep quiet, madam," cautioned the doctor. "We'll make an examination now, with your assistance."

The mother aided them, and was repaid by the announcement that no bones were broken.

"Only a hard shock," said the doctor. "She will be all right in a day or two. Children soon get over such things."

"Thank God!" sobbed the mother again, pressing the child to her bosom. The lump went out of her throat as the heavy weight was lifted from her heart.

In another room Joe Jeckel had lain down on his cot, feeling more broken up than ever in his life before. He was not only burned in several places but also shaken up from head to foot, as if he had come in contact with a powerful electric battery. The fall had jarred him till every joint ached.

"Doctor," he said, as the head surgeon came to his bedside, "I am a troublesome patient. I didn't mean to give you so much trouble, however."

"You are worse than a case of delirium tremens," remarked the surgeon. "Do you see that window there?" pointing to the broken window through which the young fireman had made his escape an hour before.

Joe looked toward the window.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose I will have to pay for it. I couldn't help it, doctor. If I were in jail and should hear that alarm bell, I think I could tear away the iron bars to get out. That bell seems to put new life and strength into me."

The surgeon looked at him in silence for several minutes. Joe wondered what had come over him.

"Was your father a fireman?" the surgeon finally asked.

"Yes—an old New York fireman. He wore a dozen medals for bravery at fires."

Joe's face glowed with pride as he spoke of his dead father.

"That accounts for it," remarked the surgeon. "You are a natural born fireman. I think you had better be chained to the bed lest that bell should call you out again to-night."

"Yes," assented Joe, "and chain the bed to the floor and the house to the ground."

The doctor laughed, and asked:

"Do you think that would hold you?"

"Well, it might," was the reply.

His burns were again dressed and an opiate given him. He slept the rest of the night, and woke up the next morning feeling too sore to even sit up in bed.

Of course the morning papers were full of the affair, and soon after breakfast scores of people came to the hospital to see the young hero. The mayor came in and congratulated him on his escape from what seemed certain death, and his rescue of the little child.

"A lady wishes to see you," said the attendant.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"Miss Atherby."

"Ah! Show her in."

Miss Atherby was shown into the room, accompanied by her widowed sister.

The beautiful woman came forward with an expression of deep concern on her face.

You are hurt again," she said.

"Only jarred and a few burns," he said. "A fireman should never mind such trifles. Think of the life I saved. And it was another little girl, too."

"Yes; God bless you for it! I must see that child. I am really thinking of establishing a home for children saved from fires."

Myra laughed.

"Celia has become a perfect enthusiast about the children you firemen have saved," she said. "She'll soon have a house full of them, if many more are saved."

"What a blessing she is to the poor little things!" replied Joe, giving Celia a look of admiration. "She ought to be a member of our company."

"I did tell her to join No. 1," said Myra.

"But No. 1 doesn't save any children," replied Celia.

Joe laughed.

"Don't be too hard on them, Miss Atherby," he said. "There are some good fellows among them."

"Yes, but very few heroes." And all three laughed.

"She will insist that you are a hero, Mr. Jeckel," said the widow. "You see, I've been married, and know a good deal about men. There is a sameness about them in many things, and there is a great deal of human nature in them, too."

"You have got us down fine," said Joe, laughing good-naturedly.

"Yes; and yet I am very partial to the men. I would not be in favor of banishing all the men from the country. The truth is, I have a good deal of human nature myself."

"Of course she has," put in her sister. "She loves my little charge as much as I do."

"I am very glad to hear that," said Joe. "How is my little friend?"

"She is doing well, though her burns have not healed yet."

You must come and see her when you are able to get out of this place."

"Thanks. I shall be only too glad to do so. I have two little girls to look after now, you know."

"Yes, and I shall help you with the other one, if permitted. Come, Myra; let's go see the other child."

The two sisters took leave of the brave fireman and left the room to go in search of the little girl he had saved.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD MISER SEEKING REVENGE ON THE PRINCE OF FIREMEN.

The reader will recollect the visit of Jack Adams and Ben Burke to the old miser, a day or two after his fracas with Joe Jeckel at the hospital. They found him pretty well knocked out, and before leaving him so effectually bulldozed him that he dared not prosecute the young foreman of the "Red Apples" for knocking him down. He was very cowardly. All misers are. The love of gold seems to destroy every other passion save that of avarice. Yet one can never love unless he can hate also. In his case he now hated Joe Jeckel as much as he loved gold.

Somehow he had settled down into the firm belief that Joe had stolen his diamonds on the night of the great fire. No process of reasoning could disabuse his mind of that one idea. Joe had said that he would get his box for him. He could recollect that, though the flames were roaring and crackling fiercely around him at the time. Since then he had seen nothing of his precious stones. The ashes had been searched. They were not found. Hence it must be, he reasoned, that the daring young fireman had taken them.

"I'll watch him," he muttered to himself, some time after Jack and Ben left him on the evening of their visit. "He won't dare sell 'em here in Appleton. He'll be making trips down to New York soon, to pawn or sell 'em. I'll have a man to watch him. He shall not escape me. I'll hound him to his death for daring to strike me as he did. It'll be the worst job he ever did in his life. I never forgive a blow. No, I'll have my turn. I am rich yet—richer than people in Appleton have any idea. I'll spend money for revenge. Yes, I'll spend money foolishly once in my life. I'll fasten that crime on him yet if it costs me as much as the stones were worth."

The old miser nursed his wrath to keep it warm. He would not waste any money on a physician to have his bruises attended to. He simply bathed his face in cold water and tied his head up in towels. It was in that condition that Jack found him.

But he recovered even sooner than Joe did.

The brave fireman had met with another perilous adventure with fire, and worse hurt than before. That second narrow escape from death by fire laid Joe up for more than a week. Before that time the old miser had hunted up a detective and struck a bargain with him.

The detective's name was Tom Truman. He was one of those keen, shrewd, unprincipled characters frequently found in that line of business. At the time the old miser ran across him business was dull with him. He was ready to go into any kind of a job that promised anything like decent pay.

"You are Tom Truman?" the old man asked as he met him on the street some four or five days after Jack's bulldozing visit.

"Yes," was the curt reply.

"A detective, eh?"

"Yes—that's my business. What's your business?"

"Come with me and I'll soon tell you," answered the old miser, turning and leading the way to his new quarters.

Tom knew the old miser well by sight, and that he was considered a very rich man by nearly everybody in Appleton. He also knew that the old man had suffered some loss in the late fire, which was not covered by insurance. The actions of the miser seemed to indicate a fee for him somewhere, so the detective followed him direct to his quarters.

When they entered the room the old man closed and locked the door, and turning to Tom, said:

"I was told you were a good detective. I want such a man on a job that will pay well. Are you at liberty to——"

"Too much liberty," said Tom, interrupting him. "Have more than I want. Like to sell you some of it."

"That means that you are out of employment just now, doesn't it?"

"Yes—that's the text exactly," said Tom. "I am open for an engagement with big pay and little work."

The old man looked quizzically at him and hesitated for a minute or two. Then he said:

"I am not much on big pay, but I will pay you well for the work I want you to do."

"I'm your man. What's the biz?" and Tom dropped into a chair, and laid his hat on his knee.

"I have reasons for believing that a certain man has stolen——"

"Your diamonds? Yes, I heard about that. You got out a warrant and——"

"Failed to get my property," said the old man, finishing the sentence for him. "I still believe he took them. He was in the room; he had the chance. I want you to keep up with him, and see that he does not sell them without your knowledge. If he sells one, that would be evidence enough; arrest him, and your reward shall be——"

"One hundred dollars a month till I catch him, or you give up the case," said Tom, finishing the sentence for him.

The old miser sprang up and gasped at the idea.

"One hundred dollars a month!" he ejaculated.

"Yes; you don't suppose I can waste my time shadowing a bloke for less than that, do you?"

"Why, it's more than my income!"

"Gammon!" said Tom. "You are as rich as Celia Atherby."

"No—no—I am a poor man to-day," protested the old man. "All my fortune was in those diamonds."

"Gammon, all gammon, old man. You own blocks of buildings in the Third Ward."

"They are all covered by mortgages. If sold out to-day I would be a bankrupt," the old miser protested again.

"Give me a written agreement to take a quarter of a million dollars for all your property in Appleton, and I'll bring you a man who will plank down the money in less than two hours."

Tom Truman was a keen character, "up to snuff," and always a match for anyone in the matter of cheek.

"I don't wish to sell out," said the old miser, lowering his voice.

"Of course not—not at that price, at any rate," chuckled Tom. "One hundred dollars a month is nothing to you, beyond your natural love of money. You can very well afford to give it; and I won't work for a cent less."

"I'll give you seventy-five dollars."

"One hundred dollars or nothing," said Tom, with a good deal of emphasis.

The old man was silent for a minute or two. He did not like to break the rule of his life—never to give a man his price for anything—and so he pondered.

"Say eighty dollars and I'll give it," he finally said.

"One hundred dollars or nothing," said Tom, very firmly.

"Well, I'll give eighty-five dollars, and not a cent more," replied the old man.

"Then you don't want me," said Tom, rising to leave the room.

"Hold on—don't go," and the miser reached out his hand to stop him. Eighty-five dollars is a heap of money, Tom Truman. Do you know that?"

"It's not much," said Tom. "Too little entirely for me to work for," and he again started to leave the room. The old miser then offered him five dollars more, but Tom would not listen to him. At last he agreed to give the sum demanded, on condition that Tom would devote all his time and energies to the matter.

"Of course I will," assented Tom. "When I take a case in hand I work it for all it's worth."

"Well, I want you to fasten the theft on him at all events. You heard about the way he treated me, did you not?"

"Yes, and I think you ought to put the law on him," replied Truman.

"I can't do it. The members of his company and others would perjure themselves to save him. I would have the costs to pay. No; I wish to get him where nothing can save him; and the day you bring about his disgrace and downfall—when he is lodged behind prison bars by your work—you can call it your own."

"By gum, old man!" exclaimed the detective, "you are down on Joe, and no mistake."

"Yes I am, and you will do well not to make any mistake about it, too."

"Oh, I'll chalk it down," said Tom, laughing. "And now, if you mean business, give us a retainer, as the lawyers say," and he held out his hand toward the miser.

"Eh? What? Pay in advance?"

"Yes—one month, if you please."

"What cheek!" gasped the old man; "why, I never heard of such a thing!"

"Oh, come now. Don't you make all your tenants pay in advance?"

"That's a different thing. I am responsible, good for my debts, and——"

"Why, blast your lying soul! Didn't you tell me just now that all your fortune was in those lost diamonds? What do you take me for, anyhow? Do you know that everybody in town calls you an old miser? Why don't you live and act like a man of liberty, and be respected by your neighbors?"

"Look here, Tom Truman! I can't stand everything. If you give me any more impudence I'll order you out of my room."

"Do you think I'll take any impudence from you, old man? Not much. You've got to act like a man, and pay like one, too, if you want me to work for you. Do you understand that? Drop the miser when you deal with me."

Old Solomon Seegar was dumbfounded at the detective's plain language, and for the moment he was on the point of ordering him out of the house. But then he remembered that Tom Truman was just the man he wanted, and so he pocketed the plain talk and paid the retainer demanded.

"Now, that's business," said Tom, as he pocketed the money. "You can depend on me putting the thing square down on him, if it can be done."

"There must be no 'if' about it, Tom Truman. Joe Jeckel knocked me down and beat me like a dog. He was guilty of that, if not of stealing my diamonds, and for that I want my revenge. Do you understand me?"

"I should smile. You shall have your revenge, old man," said the detective. "Just drop that in your snuff-box and use it. When I get on the track of game, I never let up till I fetch it."

"Good! Good!" exclaimed the miser, rubbing his hands with delight. "That's the sort of talk I like to hear. Go after him and never stop till you fetch him."

"You must not hint to anyone that I am after Joe," said Tom, as he buttoned his coat up to his chin.

"I keep my business to myself," was the curt reply.

"Sensible," remarked Turman, turning and leaving the old miser to his thoughts and contemplation of his riches.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECEPTION—A FIRE AND RESCUE—THE NOTE OF WARNING.

Joe Jeckel remained in the hospital a week after the rescue of Effie Cathey. A strict watch was kept over him to prevent his running to another fire.

During his stay there scores of the best citizens called to congratulate him.

But the members of the aristocratic No. 1 kept aloof. They did not care to make a hero of one who had belittled them by his own prodigious performances.

Yet he did not appear to notice their absence. All the members of his own company, hardy sons of toil in red shirts, called to see him and spoke words of honest admiration.

They resolved to give him a reception on the evening of the day he left the hospital. He knew nothing of their intentions when he told Ben Burke that he would leave the hospital on Thursday. Every member of the "Red Apples" at once notified his sweetheart to be ready for a supper and dance on that evening.

Joe left the hospital and went to his boarding-house, where he put on his best clothes, intending to pay a visit to little Bessie Bigelow that evening, and thank Miss Celia Atherby for her kindness to him while he was on his back.

Just as he was about to leave the house in the evening, Ben Burke and Jack Adams drove up in a carriage.

"Joe, old man," said Ben, "you are wanted at the engine house. We have been sent for you."

"What's up, boys?" he asked, shaking hands with both.

"You are wanted there by the whole crowd," replied Jack, "to settle a little difficulty we have got into since you have been away."

Joe smiled and went along with them, half suspecting the truth when he saw the carriage.

At the engine house they received him with shouts of welcome. The girls, sweethearts, wives and sisters of the brave red-shirts waved handkerchiefs and welcomed him with smiles.

"Boys," he said to those about him, "I didn't expect this."

"Of course you didn't," returned Ben, "and we knew it. We got the bulge on you, old man," and they all laughed and enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content.

Some of the ladies suggested that Joe be placed at one end of the room and shake hands with every lady in the crowd.

Joe objected. But what could he do? He had to submit, and the handshaking began.

While it was going on a carriage containing a lady and a little child drove up. She alighted and entered the hall, leading the little girl by the hand.

The lady stopped for a moment, uncertain which way to go, when one of the firemen stepped forward and said:

"Pardon me, miss. Can I serve you in any way?"

"Yes, if you please," she replied. "I heard just now that Mr. Jeckel was here. Is it true?"

"Yes, miss. He is over there, and the ladies are shaking hands with him. Shall I lead you to him, or bring him to you?"

"Thanks—no. I will go to him," and she pressed through the crowd, leading the little girl by the hand.

In a minute or two she was right up in front of Joe.

"Good evening, Mr. Jeckel," she said, extending a jeweled hand toward him; "I am glad to see you out again."

At the first sound of her voice Joe was startled.

He looked keenly at her and grasped her hand in both of his.

"Why, Miss Atherby!" he exclaimed, "we did not expect this honor!"

"Is it an honor? I am sure I did not think so," she replied, smiling sweetly. "I came to honor you—Bessie and I," and she drew the little girl toward him.

He stooped and lifted little Bessie in his arms and kissed her.

In a few moments her presence was known to all in the room.

The brave firemen nearly lifted the roof with their cheers, and crowded around the wealthy friend of little Bessie to pay homage to her for her goodness of heart and other womanly attributes. She was forced to stand near Joe and receive the whole crowd.

"Really, this is a reception to you, Miss Atherby!" said Joe, laughing. "What a surprise it is to our friends?"

"I did not mean it, did not dream of such a thing," she protested. "I would get away if I could. I accidentally heard you were here at an impromptu reception, and the notion to bring little Bessie to see her preserver took possession of me, and here we are. What a scolding my sister will give me when she hears of it!"

"I am sorry your sister did not come with you. She would have an opportunity to compare our girls with those of her own set. Just look around you at our wives, sisters and sweethearts. Did you ever see so many beautiful women together at one time?"

"I never did," she replied, and by that reply won the hearts of all the girls in the room. "But which one is your sweetheart, Mr. Jeckel?"

Joe looked at her, then all round the room. Every eye was upon him. Would he make a choice then and there?

He stood and lifted little Bessie in his arms again, saying:

"Bessie is my sweetheart," and then he kissed the child.

A hearty laugh greeted the episode, and Ben Burke sang out:

"That's dodging, Joe, old man. She went back on you for another fellow!"

A roar greeted the hit, and in the merriment that followed Joe led Miss Atherby to a seat.

"I must return home now," she said, rising, after being seated but a few minutes. "I have remained longer than I intended."

"Oh, you must partake of our supper!" cried the wife of one of the members of the company.

"Thanks, but I cannot. I——"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The huge fire bell rang out from the tall tower a quarter of a mile away, clear and distinct.

After the first sound, an instant hush fell upon the assembly. Only the sound of the great bell broke the silence.

Stalwart firemen who were about to dance with their sweethearts turned at the last stroke of the bell and rushed downstairs to the engine room, leaving their fair partners trembling with fear and dire apprehensions.

Joe was by little Bessie's side when the first alarm was sounded.

"Ah! That ends it, I fear!" he said, turning to Miss Atherby.

"Yes, you will have to go. I do hope you may not get hurt again."

"Thanks!" he replied. Then he called out in loud tones:

"Ladies, if we are not back inside a half hour, you can all go home at your leisure!"

Then he hurried downstairs to join his comrades.

"Go back, Joe! Go back!" cried a score of them at once. "Stay here with the ladies!"

"I won't do it!" he replied, seizing his trumpet and rushing out with them.

The brave fellows hastened to the place of conflagration.

They were the first on the ground, though the farthest off when they started, owing to the fact that they were all at the engine house when the alarm was sounded.

The house, which was a sort of tenement frame building, was wrapt in flames in a very few minutes. The inflammable material burned like shavings. It was only by sheer good luck that many of the inmates escaped with their lives.

Joe rushed inside and helped an old man to make his exit through a window.

"There's a woman asleep in the next room," said the old man to the brave fireman as he descended the ladder.

Joe threw himself against the door of the room and burst it in. A young lady stood in the centre of the room almost paralyzed with fear, and but half dressed. She was trying to throw a dress over her head.

He seized her in his arms and said:

"No time to dress now! Come out if you would escape alive!"

"My dress! My dress!" she screamed. "Let me put it on!" and she struggled so hard to free herself that Joe was forced to release her. He then adroitly slipped the dress over her head.

"You can fasten it outside," he cried, again seizing her.

This time she made no resistance, and in a few moments he was descending the ladder with her clinging to his neck.

At the foot of the ladder she fainted dead away. But the crowd cheered the heroic fireman for the gallant rescue.

The fire raged till the entire building was consumed. The light frame was like a tinder-box in inflammability. Nothing could save it after the fire got a good start.

An ambulance was sent for to carry the young lady to the hospital. But ere it reached the spot she had recovered consciousness and refused to go.

"I am not hurt," she said. "I do not care to go there," and then she felt in the pocket of her dress, as if to make sure of still having possession of something which she prized very highly.

"Have you anywhere to go?" she was asked.

"No; but I can go to a boarding house," she replied.

"Take her to mine," suggested Joe Jeckel. "She can get a good room there."

Several parties volunteered to show her the way, and she went with them.

Joe and his red-shirts remained a couple of hours at the scene of conflagration to prevent another outbreak, and then returned to their quarters, quite disgusted at the sudden interruption of their festivities at the hall.

The guests had all returned to their homes, and the lights were out in the hall over the engine room.

"It wasn't much of a fire," remarked Jack Adams, "but it spoiled our fun for the evening."

"Yes, so it did. But did you notice that pretty seamstress Joe took out of the building just as the roof was caving in?"

"Yes; she is good looking, isn't she?"

"Best looking girl I've seen in a month. Who is she, anyhow?"

"Don't know. I'm going to find out. She was sent to Joe's boarding house. He can find out all about her to-morrow."

Joe was about to leave to go to his home when a man, a stranger to all in the company, pushed forward and placed a note in his hand.

The man then turned away and was gone in an instant.

Joe looked at the note.

It was written in a female hand and read as follows:

"MR. JOE JECKEL:—I have good reasons for saying to you, beware of old Solomon Seegar. He is plotting your ruin."

"A FRIEND."

CHAPTER X.

THE SEWING-GIRL'S LOST TREASURE.

To say that Joe was surprised at the contents of the note so mysteriously handed him would be but a mild expression. He was thunderstruck, and for a moment or two quite uncertain which way to move.

"What is it, old man?" Ben Burke asked, who noticed the expression of his face.

"Nothing," he replied. "Who was that fellow? Where did he go?"

Ben and two or three others ran to the door and looked out on the street in quest of the stranger. But he could not be seen.

"He is gone," Ben said. "Who is the note from?"

"That's what I wish to find out," he answered. "It's from a woman, I am sure."

"Why, didn't she sign her name to it?"

"No—see for yourselves," and he gave them the note to read.

They each took a good look at the note; very much surprised at its contents.

"It was written by a woman of good education," remarked Jack Adams, who was well educated himself, "for not a word is misspelled, and the writing is beautiful. What can old Seegar be up to, I wonder?"

"Hang Seegar!" ejaculated Joe. "I don't care the snap of my fingers for him. He can't do me any harm. If he tries it on I'll make him so sick that he'll wish he had never been born."

"But this shows that he trying to do something, doesn't it?" Ben asked.

"Oh, he may have said something about getting even with me for the black eye I gave him; or what he'd like to do to me, or something of that sort, and some girl overheard him. The old chap won't bother me, I guess."

"I'd like to get his head under my left arm once," remarked Jack, making a significant gesture with his right hand toward the spot indicated.

"So would I," remarked Ben Burke. "I think it would ache for a month at least. What are you going to do about it, Joe?"

"Nothing. What can I do?"

"Punch his head," suggested one of the party.

"But he won't give me a chance to do that," replied Joe, laughing as he placed the note in his pocket. "I guess he has got enough."

They then separated and went to their several homes.

Joe reached his boarding house at about midnight, and found good old Mrs. Bowen sitting up waiting for him.

"Nice time of night for a young man to come home," she said, looking up at the clock. "Here I've been waiting more'n an hour to see you."

"Why, what in the world are you doing up so late, Mrs. Bowen?" he exclaimed. "Why, you are positively getting young and gay again."

"Young and gay, indeed! I'm getting old and gray trotting after you young folks. Julia Thorne asked me to sit up till you came home, to tell you that she——"

"Who in thunder is Julia Thorne?" Joe exclaimed, interrupting the old lady.

She opened wide her eyes and glared at him, while a look of surprise overcast her face.

"Do you mean to say, Joe Jeckel, that you don't know Julia Thorne?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I never heard that name before till now."

"Well, well!" she gasped. "That does beat all—the hussy!"

"Why, what is it? What did she tell you to tell me?" Joe asked, as much mystified as his landlady was.

"Why, she asked me to tell you that she wanted to see you in the morning before you left the house. She is in room No. 7, on the second floor."

"Oh, she is here in the house?"

"Yes. She says you told her to come here," and the good, motherly soul looked suspiciously at him as she spoke.

"Oh!" and Joe laughed. "I think I understand it now. She came from the fire, didn't she?"

"Yes; she said everything she had, except what she had on her back, was burned up."

"Well, I did tell her to come here. I didn't know her name. I took her out of her room just in time to save her life. You can take care of her, can't you?"

"Of course I can, if she pays for it like all of you do."

"Oh! I'll see that you are paid. Don't be uneasy about that. Julia Thorne, did you say her name was?"

"Yes," said the old lady, preparing to retire to her room.

"It's a pretty name," said Joe to himself, "and now that I think of it, I recollect that I thought she was a very pretty girl as I took her up in my arms and went down the ladder with her. What does she want to see me for, I wonder? Did she write that note?"

Joe went up to his room and went to bed, thinking of the incidents of the evening till he got them all badly mixed up. When he fell asleep it was to dream of fires, perilous rescues and beautiful women.

He was up bet mes, though, and as he went down to breakfast he was met by a servant of the house, who told him that a lady in the parlor wished to see him.

"Ah, yes," he said, turning and going to the parlor.

As he entered he saw a beautiful young lady rise to receive him.

"You are Mr. Jeckel?" she said.

"Yes, that's my name," he replied, removing his hat and bowing.

"I am Julia Thorne; you took me out of my room last night when the house was burning, thus saving my life at the risk of your own."

"I am glad I was able to be of service to you, Miss Thorne. I am still at your service," and he made a profound bow to the young lady.

"Thanks for your kindness," she replied, seating herself. "I am in need of advice from some one, and as I have already experienced a kindness at your hands I thought I would apply to you."

"You can commend me, Miss Thorne," said Joe again. "I always stand by those I have been in the fire with."

"God bless you, sir!" she sobbed, suddenly bursting into tears.

"Oh, don't cry, don't cry!" said Joe, growing nervous.

"Pardon me," she said, drying her tears. "I have had so little kindness shown me of late that your sympathy touched my heart."

"Have you been treated unkindly?" he asked.

"Oh, cruelly—most cruelly," she said, again sobbing. "But I won't give way to my feelings any more," and again she dried her tears and even tried to smile.

"Tell me," Joe asked, "did you escape unhurt last night?"

"Yes, sir. I did not get even a bruise, thanks to your good protection."

"I am glad to hear that. You lost all your effects, though, did you not?"

"Yes, sir, and that's what I wish to see you about. I am a poor sewing-girl, and my sewing machine was my support. That, and my wardrobe, a poor one at best, were destroyed. But in one of the drawers of that machine was a relic which I prized even as my life."

"Indeed? What was it?"

"A single diamond—one in the rough—which had never been cut. It was very large, and worth at least three thousand dollars."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Joe, staring at the sewing-girl in deepest amazement. "A sewing-girl with a three thousand dollar diamond!"

"Yes," and she looked him in the eyes with an honest, steady gaze that told him she was telling the truth.

He looked at her in silence, as if waiting for her to continue.

"I'll tell you the secret," she finally continued, "though I have never breathed it to a living soul till now. I am twenty-six years old—I don't mind telling my age—and have had that diamond in my possession seven years. I was engaged to a young man when I was but eighteen years old. He was poor, but his pluck and energy were as great as his love for me. To sooner make it possible for us to marry, he went to the diamond fields in Africa. After six months he sent me a rough diamond which he had found, and with it this letter."

Here she drew from the pocket of her dress a crumpled letter, which she opened and handed to Joe to read. Joe looked at the date and saw that it was seven years back.

"My darling Julia," it ran, "I have had the good fortune to find a diamond of great value, which I hasten to send to you, to keep as it is till we meet again. It is the nest egg of the fortune that is to enable me to keep her I love better than my own soul, in the ease and comfort she so well deserves. If such good luck falls to me again soon I shall hasten back to England to claim my bride. A thousand kisses for you, my darling. Dream of me as ever. Your own CHARLIE L."

"So you are English, are you?" he asked as he handed the letter back to her.

"Yes. I came to America a year ago, and have been here four months. I never heard from Charlie any more after receiving that letter, as it was the last one I ever received from him. After two years had passed a man from the diamond fields in Africa came and told me that poor Charlie had been killed by the natives. It came near killing me, I loved him so. You can understand now, why I kept the diamond as it was through all my days of want. Somehow I have never been able to persuade myself to believe that Charlie is really dead. A hope still lingers in my heart."

"Yes, yes," said Joe, tears filling his eyes, "I understand. I'll have those ashes searched for the diamond."

"Thanks. That's what I wished to see you for."

"I'll attend to it at once. Come, let me lead you down to breakfast," and he gave her his arm and led her down to the breakfast table.

CHAPTER XI.

SEARCHING FOR THE DIAMOND IN THE ASHES—THE ARREST OF JOE JECKEL.

Boarding in the same house with our hero was a young man by the name of Durham. He was a traveler for one of the manufacturers of Appleton. A good talker, and having the gift of perseverance, he was successful as a drummer. But he was not popular with his intimates, because of his selfishness in everything pertaining to himself.

The boarders at Mrs. Bowen's called him "Drum" for short, a corruption of his name and occupation. He did not object to the sobriquet, but went on his way with both eyes always open for the main chance.

On the morning of the interview between Joe Jeckel and Julia Thorne in the parlor of the boarding house, Durham was concealed behind the heavy curtain of the front window. He was there waiting for a chance to see Sallie Bowen, the landlady's daughter, of whom he pretended to be deeply enamored. When Julia came in he slipped behind the curtain and kept concealed, thinking she would soon go down to breakfast. Sallie passed the door two or three times but did not go in as she did not wish to have one of her own sex witness her tete-a-tete with her lover.

In this way he became possessed of the secret of Julia Thorne's diamond, and the story of her life, without being in the least suspected.

But the moment Joe Jeckel and the young lady left the parlor to go down to breakfast, Durham hastened to leave the house. Just before he reached the front door he met Sallie Bowen, and whispered to her:

"I waited so long in the parlor for you that I am compelled to leave now without my breakfast."

"I am sorry," simpered Sallie, "but somebody was in there."

"Yes—no matter. I'll be back for dinner," and snatching a kiss from her cherry lips, he hastened away.

Out on the street he muttered to himself:

"Why should not I find the diamond as well as he? Who knows but I may? A diamond worth three thousand dollars is not to be found every day, or every year either, for that matter. Why should I say anything about it if I should find it? It will be an hour or so before he comes to hunt for it. By that time I may find it and be off with it."

In a little while he was at the scene of last night's fire. The ashes were now cold, for it was midwinter. Only a few people were now about the place viewing the ruins. The police were not guarding it, as no one suspected that anything of value remained in the ashes.

Durham glanced over the ruins and muttered:

"Just my luck! I don't know in what part of the house Julia Thorne lived. If I knew in which corner her room was I'd have a better show. Ah! There's a sewing machine wheel over there! That makes the matter as simple as A B C. Here goes," and he waded in among the ashes to where he had seen the iron wheel of a sewing machine lying among the ruins.

But when he reached it he looked beyond and saw the iron works of another machine.

"There's another one, as I'm a sinner," he exclaimed. "Which was hers, I wonder?"

He stood there looking first at one and then at the other ruined sewing machine trying to decide which one to attack first. Just as he was about to make up his mind he saw another iron wheel like the other two.

"That's three, by gosh!" he exclaimed. "I wonder how many more were in the house? Does every woman in town own a sewing machine?"

He began a search for sewing machines and succeeded in finding the remains of five among the ruins.

"That beats me!" he said. "I've got to search 'em all to find the right one. That diamond is pretty close to the one it was with when the fire came."

He began the search among the ruins on the southwest corner of the house, raking among the debris around the ruins of a sewing machine, carefully examining every particle of ashes.

He was thus employed when he was accosted with:

"Why, what in thunder are you looking for there, Drum?"

Looking up he beheld Joe Jeckel, the "Prince of Firemen," as he was now called by everybody.

The interruption was not unexpected by him, but it came sooner than anticipated. Hence the surprise and confusion that followed.

Joe looked hard at him, waiting for a reply.

"I—I—was—ah—looking to see what effect a fire would have on the ironworks of these machines," Durham finally replied.

"Oh, you are, eh? Well, what effect does it have?"

"It depends upon the amount of heat, I suppose. I find such things as the large wheels but little injured, while the smaller works are ruined entirely."

"Indeed!" and Joe smiled. "And did you come off without your breakfast just to find out that?"

"Oh, no. I came out for a walk before breakfast, which I am in the habit of doing every fine morning, you know. I stopped here to see these ruins. That's how I came to be here. Just look at that mass of iron and other metal. See how it has run together," and he held a mass of iron up which the great heat of the fire had welded together.

"Yes, I see. Fire generally gets the best of everything if it gets a fair show. I came out to look among these ashes for something that was lost in the conflagration last night," and he walked straight over the northeast corner of the lot and began to rake tenderly among the ashes around the remains of a sewing machine.

The moment he did that Durham ceased searching over on his side. He knew that Joe was posted as to the right locality, and that it was useless to look anywhere else.

But he concealed his disappointment well, and stood around to see if the gallant fireman would be rewarded for his trouble.

A half hour passed, and quite a number of people came by and stopped to view the ruins. Durham espied Tom Truman on the other side of the lot watching Joe. Being acquainted with him, he passed round to that side and spoke to him.

"What's Jeckel looking for over there?" Tom asked as Durham came up to where he was standing.

"Guess."

"I can't. I am not good at guessing," was the reply.

"Well, he's looking for diamonds," said Durham, in a half-confidential whisper.

"The deuce!"

"Yes; one of the women in that house lost her diamond in the fire, and Joe is looking for it."

"Oh, come off! All the women in that house couldn't own one diamond as big as a pin's head."

Durham dared not relate the story of the diamond, for fear he would give himself away, and thus expose the way in which he came into possession of the secret. But he shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"I don't know anything about that, but he is looking for diamonds nevertheless," and then he turned and walked away, going back to the boarding house with an appetite for anything he could find on the table.

Tom Truman was thunderstruck by what he had heard. He was watching the fireman for pay, not having the least suspicion in his mind that Joe was guilty of anything worse than mashing the old miser's nose. But now a new idea flashed through his fertile brain.

"By all that's holy!" he muttered to himself, as he stood there and watched Joe raking among the ashes, "Joe is sharper than a razor. He will pretend to find a diamond or two in those ashes, and show one of old Seegar's diamonds as proof that he had found one. It's too thin, though. None of the inmates of the house could own diamonds. If he finds one I'll arrest him as sure as my name is Tom Truman! Lord, what a sensation it will raise, and what a reputation it will give me! Joe Jeckel, I didn't think it of you, but every man has his price, and you've got yours. I've got my off eye on you." He sauntered around the place for nearly a half hour, and then strolled over to the northeast corner of the lot, and looked on, as a dozen others were doing.

Suddenly Joe sprang up, looking at a small pebble in his hand. He appeared to be somewhat excited, and held the pebble up to get a clearer view of it in the sunlight.

"Yes, this is it," he muttered. "I've seen rough stones in the jeweler's window, and this is just like them. I'll go and show it to her, anyhow;" and he at once made his way out of the bed of ashes to the pavement.

"Joe Jeckel," said Truman, laying his hand on his shoulder, "I arrest you; you are my prisoner!"

Joe wheeled and confronted him.

Tom looked him straight in the eyes, and kept his right hand on his revolver. He was a brave, reckless sort of fellow, and did not hesitate or falter in the least.

"What do you mean, Tom Truman?" Joe asked, looking the detective straight in the eyes.

"It means that the game is up, Joe," was the cool reply. "I arrest you for the theft of old man Seegar's diamonds."

Joe started.

He was not dreaming of that old charge, since public opinion had so emphatically condemned it.

His first impulse was to knock him down in his tracks, as he had once served the old miser. The hot blood mounted to his face and his eyes flashed fire.

But his cooler judgment prevailed, and he said:

"All right, but if you don't make a case against me, you'll wish you had never been born, Tom Truman."

"I think I have proof enough," said Tom, confidently. "Just hand me that stone you found in those ashes just now. That's proof enough, I take it."

Joe held the stone up so that all in the crowd could see it, and said:

"This I found in the ashes there. It belongs to Miss Julia Thorne. I came here at her request to look for it. I will not turn it over to you, Truman."

"Bring it along with you, then. I am not particular. Will you go with me to the station-house?"

"Oh, yes," and they started off together, followed by the crowd.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCENE IN THE COURT-ROOM.

On the way to the station Joe said not a word to Truman or any one else.

He was thinking.

The thought flashed through his mind that the whole thing was a plot to entrap him. If so, the charge against him would be sustained. If Julia Thorne stood by him and claimed the diamond as her own, he would be cleared.

All these things flashed through his mind as he went along to the station.

It was an early hour. No court was in session at the time. So he had to go into the private room of the chief of police and be searched.

"Here's a valuable diamond, chief," said Joe, handing the stone to the chief. "Keep it until it is called for in court. It belongs to Miss Julia Thorne. I found it in the ashes this morning among the ruins of her sewing machine, where I went to look for it at her request."

The chief took the stone and examined it carefully, and asked:

"Who is Julia Thorne, and where does she live?"

"She is a seamstress, and now lives at Mrs. Bowen's boarding house, on James street. Up to last night she lived at the corner of Tompkins and Hart streets, which building was destroyed last night by fire."

The chief wrote down his statement and then turned to Truman and asked:

"Do you want him locked up till the court opens?"

"I leave that with you, if you will be responsible for him," was the reply.

"Oh, I'll be responsible for him," said the chief.

"I don't want you to do that," said Joe; "lock me up just as you would a stranger, for I intend to see this thing through to the bitter end."

"Very well—come this way," and the chief led the way to the office of the turnkey, where he was assigned to a cell.

Truman then hastened away in quest of old Solomon Seegar, while Joe wrote a note to a lawyer—a particular friend of his—asking him to come to the station-house at once.

The lawyer came in haste, and was dumfounded at seeing the "Prince of Firemen" behind prison bars on such a serious charge.

Joe soon told him his story.

"Ah!" he said, "I'll go and see Miss Thorne. It all depends on her. If she is not bribed to do this thing you are all right."

"Oh, I am sure she is all right," said Joe. "I have no uneasiness on that score."

"Well, I'll go and see her at any rate, and then come back and let you know what she says." And the lawyer took his leave to hasten to Mrs. Bowen's boarding house.

Julia Thorne was astounded when the lawyer told his story.

"Why the diamond is mine!" she exclaimed. "This letter will explain how I came by it," and she handed him her lover's letter to read.

That satisfied his mind on the question of ownership.

"You will have to come into court, Miss Thorne," he said, "and tell the story as you have told it to me. It is necessary you should do so."

"I'll do it," she said. "It is my diamond. I know the exact weight of it, even to a grain. Mr. Jeckel went to search for it at my request."

In the meantime Tom Truman found the old miser at his home and told him what he had done.

The old man fairly leaped in his joy, and exclaimed:

"I knew you'd catch 'im! I felt it in my bones. You are the best detective in the country!"

"You'll have to be in court at ten o'clock to swear to the diamond," said Truman.

"Yes—yes—off with this old coat! Here, help me put on this!" and the old rascal hustled off an old coat and put a great-coat on instead with Tom's assistance.

As soon as he had his overcoat on he hastened to the station-house to see the prisoner. He chuckled with glee all the way.

"Ah, I have him now!" he said, as he neared the station. "Tom has got the dead sure thing on him this time. The chief has the diamond. Ha! ha! ha! The idea of that poor seamstress having a three thousand dollar diamond. Bah! It's a put-up job between them to work the precious stones he stole from me."

Rushing into the station-house, he asked for the chief. He was shown into his room, where he burst out:

"So we've got the rascal at last!"

"What rascal?" the chief asked.

"Why, Joe Jeckel, the thief."

"I am not so sure that he is a thief, sir."

"Well, I am. You have the diamond that was found on him this morning, have you not?"

"Yes, I have it."

"Let me see it."

"You can see it in court."

"Ah, yes. Is he locked up?"

"Yes."

"Can I speak with him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because there is no necessity for it. You can see him in court in a couple of hours from now."

"But I just want to——"

"See him behind the bars," put in the chief, "and chuckle over him. You have begun a thing that may end in trouble for you, Mr. Seegar."

"I don't see what you have got to do with it."

He took Seegar by the shoulders, turned him toward the front door, and ran him through it, saying:

"That's all I have to do with it just now. If you come back here I shall have more to do with it. Do you understand?"

He did understand, and took good care not to let the chief have anything more to do with it.

Two hours later the court opened and Joe and his lawyer were on hand. Julia Thorne came and sat near his lawyer, dressed just as she was when she escaped the fire the night before, save in the matter of a hat. That article she had to borrow from Sallie Bowen, her landlady's daughter.

The court-room was crowded with the young fireman's friends, many of whom looked daggers at the old miser.

The charge was read and Joe indignantly denied it through his lawyer.

"We are ready to prove the ownership of the diamond," said the lawyer. "It belongs to a young lady who is in the court-room ready to answer any questions that may be asked her. There is no need of postponing the trial to another day, as all the parties concerned are here."

"We have no desire to postpone it even an hour," said the old miser's lawyer.

Old Solomon Seegar was called up to testify. He told the story of the loss of his diamonds, and said that, as they could not be found in the ashes, they must have been removed before the destruction of the house. Joe Jeckel was the last man known to have been there. He had since been arrested with one of the diamonds in his possession.

Here the diamond was shown the old miser.

"It is one of mine," he said. "I remember it well. I can swear to it."

Then Joe's lawyer took him in hand.

"How much did you pay for it, Mr. Seegar?" he asked.

"Three thousand dollars in gold," was the reply.

"Diamonds are valued according to weight and color, are they not?"

"Yes, always."

"Then you know how many carats this one is?"

"Well, I don't really recollect," was the hesitating reply.

"Don't you keep a record of each precious stone—of its weight and value?"

"Sometimes I do and sometimes not."

"That means that in this case you did not, does it?"

"I did not weigh this one."

The judge was surprised.

"Do I understand you to say that you gave three thousand dollars for a diamond without knowing how much it weighed?" he asked.

"I guessed the weight," said the miser confusedly.

"At how much?"

"About twenty-two carats."

"That will do. Miss Julia Thorne will please take the stand," called out Joe's lawyer.

The young seamstress came forward. The excitement made her look all the more beautiful.

She told her story in a clear, straightforward manner, even producing the letter of her lover. She also told how she came to leave it in her sewing machine drawer that night; how she missed it, and asked Joe to look for it among the ruins of the machine.

"You have had it several years, have you not?" Joe's lawyer asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And know how much it weighs?"

"Yes, sir. It weighs sixteen and a half carats exactly."

"Will the court please send for a jeweler to come here and weigh this stone?" Joe's lawyer asked.

The judge ordered a messenger to go in quest of a well-known jeweler. In a little while the jeweler came in with his scales.

He weighed the stone in the presence of the court.

"It weighs just sixteen and a half carats, your honor," he said, when he had finished weighing it.

"That is all I have to offer," said Joe's lawyer.

"And that is enough, I am sure," remarked the judge.

Seegar's lawyer sprang to his feet and began a savage attack on the character of Julia Thorne, ridiculing the idea of a poor seamstress owning a three thousand dollar diamond.

"Her character has nothing to do with it," said the judge, "and even if it did the court is of the opinion that she is infinitely more respectable than either you or your client. Let me see that stone."

As the judge reached out his hand for the diamond the great fire bell rang out.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

At the first sound Joe sprang toward the door. Tom Truman tried to intercept him. Joe planted a blow between his eyes that laid him senseless on the floor.

"Stop him! Stop him!" cried the old miser, waving his arms frantically above his head.

But no one attempted to stop him.

On the contrary everybody seemed bent on getting out with him. The judge himself stood up and gazed on the scene with an interest which showed the tendency of his sympathy. Julia Thorne almost fainted with fear.

At last Joe got out and bounded away like a wild deer. Half a hundred people rushed after him, cheering at the top of their lungs, keeping up the chase to the engine house, and thence to the fire.

In the meantime Tom Truman managed to regain his feet. He glared around in a dazed sort of way, not knowing which way to turn, till old Solomon Seegar rushed up to him and exclaimed:

"He has escaped! After him! Catch him and bring him back, dead or alive!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRINCE OF FIREMEN'S TRIUMPH—TOM TRUMAN'S MISTAKE.

When Joe Jeckel sprang away from the court-room at the first alarm from the great fire bell, Judge Walton was holding the diamond under dispute in his hand. He had just severely rebuked the old miser's lawyer for attempting to asperse the character of Julia Thorne.

Of course the prisoner's exit from the court-room created the greatest excitement and confusion. The court instantly ceased to be a court, and every man tried to keep his eye on the prisoner, more to see the result of any attempt to hold him than anything else.

But after he had gotten away the judge resumed his seat and rapped for order. Tom Truman, as soon as he had fully regained his senses, urged on by old Solomon Seegar, hastened out of the court-room and went in search of Joe.

As the judge retained the diamond the old miser remained in the court-room with his lawyer, hoping to gain possession of the precious stone.

"Your honor," said Seegar's lawyer, "you have just seen the best evidence of the prisoner's guilt. Only the guilty try to escape from the majesty of the law. This man Jeckel dares not face——"

"Enough of that," said the judge. "The prisoner is at work this moment trying to save the lives and property of his fellow citizens, while you and your client are trying to ruin his character. I think it has been conclusively proved that this diamond belongs to Miss Thorne. Your client has sworn falsely. I don't believe he ever saw this stone before to-day. The diamond is hers, and the prisoner is discharged."

Old Solomon Seegar almost tore his hair in his rage.

"I am robbed!" he exclaimed. "The diamond is mine."

"The sheriff will please put the plaintiff out of the room," ordered the judge. The sheriff very promptly obeyed, and showed the miser to the door.

Julia Thorne took the diamond, placed it in the pocket of her dress, and left the court-room. There were not a dozen persons in the room when she left it. She tripped gracefully down the steps and was half way down the block toward the next street, when she was touched on the shoulder.

Looking suddenly around she found herself face to face with the old miser. Her first impulse was to scream and call for the police. But he spoke and asked:

"Will you sell that stone?"

"No," she replied. "Not for a million dollars."

"I'll give you three thousand dollars in gold for it."

"You are not rich enough to buy it, since perjuring yourself for the purpose of getting it for nothing," she replied, turning to go.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, with a devilish maliciousness. "You'll be glad to sell it yet. You'll get no more work in Appleton. That is my diamond, and you know it. I'll follow you to the ends of the earth till I make you give it up or sell it to me."

So fiercely did he hiss his threat that she turned and fled as if for her life, leaving the old villain standing on the street gazing after her.

She reached Mrs. Bowen's boarding house in a few minutes, rushing into the room where the good old lady sat, almost out of breath.

"I got my diamond," she exclaimed, showing the precious stone to Mrs. Bowen.

"I am glad for your sake, my dear child," said the old lady, looking at the first rough diamond she ever saw in her life.

* * * * *

Joe Jeckel ran at the head of his brave red-shirts, who turned out from the shops at a moment's notice, with sooty hands and faces.

The fire was in a store about a half mile from the engine house, and was soon extinguished. Only about ten minutes were required for that purpose.

"How did you come out, Joe?" Ben Burke asked, as soon as he had a chance to talk to him.

"Hanged if I know!" said Joe, laughing. "When I heard the fire bell I knocked Tom Truman down and came out to join you fellows."

He could have said nothing that would have pleased the boys more. They threw up their hats and shouted themselves hoarse, as they all started to return to the engine house.

When about half way back Tom Truman met them. He drew his revolver and ordered Joe to surrender.

"You are an escaped prisoner," he said; "I arrest you, dead or alive."

Ben Burke did not wait to see what Joe would do or say. He deliberately walked up to Tom and knocked him down. The revolver was discharged, but nobody was hurt.

The others rushed up to him and Joe saw that it was going hard with him.

"Hold on, boys," he cried out to them. "Just leave him to me. I can take care of myself."

"Of course you can," said Ben Burke, "but no galoot like

Tom Truman can come poking revolvers at a man with a red shirt on and not get knocked down, eh, boys?"

"No!" yelled the firemen.

Tom rose to his feet and was very promptly knocked down again.

"Now let him alone, boys," said Joe. "I'll go back to the court and see what has been done since I left there."

"We'll go with you!" cried Ben Burke.

"Yes—yes—get on the engine!" cried the others. He was forced to get on the engine, and thus they escorted him back to the court-room.

There Joe's lawyer met him and told him the result of the case.

Then the boys yelled like lunatics, and made the lawyer get upon the engine with Joe.

At the engine house they had a regular jollification over the affair.

"Boys," said Jack Adams, "Julia Thorne lost her sewing machine, and——"

"We'll buy her another!" cried one of the men. "Out with your money, boys!"

Every man put down a dollar—some even more—and in two minutes there was money enough to buy the pretty seamstress another and better machine than the one she had lost.

Joe was told to give her the money, the sum being handed to him for that purpose.

When Joe returned to his quarters he found Julia almost prostrated by the excitement of the trial, to say nothing of the fire the night before. She smiled and congratulated him on the result of the trial, and said:

"I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Jeckel. If I knew how I could repay you for——"

"Oh, I can tell you how you can do that," said he, interrupting her.

"How, pray?"

"By accepting this sum of money which our company raised for you just now," and he laid the roll of bills on the little table in front of her as he spoke.

She was dumfounded at first, and then burst into tears.

"Oh, I didn't know there were such good people in the world," she said. "How can I thank them? Tell them how much I thank them. I can't find words strong enough."

"Just take the money," said Joe, "and count every member of the 'Red Apples' as a friend. That will please the boys," and with that he left her and went upstairs to his room.

The young lady took up the roll of bills and carefully counted them.

The sum exceeded her guess considerably, and she exclaimed:

"Why, this is more than enough to buy me another machine! How glad I am! What a noble set of young men they are!"

At noon when Joe came down to dinner—for he had not yet gone back to the shop to work—she told him of her interview with the old miser, who wanted to buy the diamond.

"Good Lord!" Joe exclaimed. "The old villain has even more cheek than I had given him credit for!"

She laughed and said:

"He has more than any man I ever saw."

"I guess he has. Let me tell you, Miss Thorne, that now it is known that you have such a treasure in your possession, it is exceedingly dangerous for you to keep it about you. You had better deposit it in some good bank."

She looked serious.

"Do you really think that?" she asked.

"Indeed I do. It was safe enough as long as it was not known. Now everybody in Appleton knows of it, and that you came away from the court-room with it in your possession."

"Then I will place it in a bank, if you will tell me which one," she said, after a pause of a minute or two.

"The Bank of Appleton is a safe one," he said.

"I will place it there." And she seemed greatly relieved at having made up her mind about it.

After dinner Joe escorted her to the bank, where she left the precious stone on deposit.

"Oh, you don't know what a service you have done me, Mr. Jeckel," she said, as they returned together to the boarding house. "But for you I don't know what I should have done. I am sure I would have perished in the flames."

"Well, you didn't, and I'm glad of it."

"So am I," and she laughed sweetly as she made the remark.

That evening Joe paid a visit to little Bessie Bigelow. Celia Atherby received him with a cordiality that made him feel perfectly at home in the grand house.

Little Bessie sat on his knee before the glowing grate and toyed with his watch chain, while Miss Celia Atherby asked him about Julia Thorne and her uncut diamond.

"Poor girl!" she said. "She must have suffered much in all these years she has been waiting for the return of her lover."

"Yes, indeed. But she is one of the uncomplaining kind whose love never dies."

"Ah! You don't believe in such love, do you?" she asked.

"Indeed I do," and he toyed with little Bessie's curls. "I don't believe in any other kind. When I love it will be a deathless passion."

"I believe you."

"I am glad you do. It will be the same with you, too, because when you love it will be sincere."

"I know that full well," she returned, "and therefore hope I shall not be so unfortunate as Miss Thorne is."

"You certainly deserve to be happy, for the happiness you confer upon others," said Joe, with a glow of honest admiration in his eyes and face.

"It is a true source of happiness to me to make others happy," and she blushed like a young girl as she made the remark.

"Of course it is, and it's a true woman's heart that appreciates such happiness."

"I would like ever so much to see Miss Thorne, and do something toward aiding her to repair her losses by the fire."

"You can do that. She is a splendid seamstress, and not afraid of work, she says."

"Will you be so kind as to ask her to call on me?" she asked.

"Yes, it will afford me great pleasure to do so."

That evening when Joe returned to his boarding house he found Durham courting Sallie Bowen in the parlor. He stopped and chaffed them a few minutes.

"Oh, you go 'long, now," said Sallie, laughing; "you have more girls than you can attend to. I suppose you'll court Miss Thorne and her diamond next."

Joe laughed heartily.

"She is better looking than her diamond," he said. "By the way, she and I will call on Miss Celia Atherby to-morrow night. I guess she will have a friend who will be of more use to her than beaux," and with a pleasant good night he went up to his room, leaving the lovers alone in the parlor.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURHAM AND THE DETECTIVE—THE ALARM.

As Joe ascended the stairs Durham turned to Sallie and asked:

"Do you think he loves Miss Thorne?"

"I don't know. Joe is such a good fellow, always ready to even risk his life for others, particularly girls, that one never knows where to locate his affections. Why do you ask?"

"Because I thought his heart was turning in that direction since he found out she had a big diamond."

"Oh, as for that matter, somebody else was looking for the diamond before he was."

Durham turned white and red by turns, and asked:

"Who told you that?"

"A little bird," and she pouted as only a pretty girl with cherry lips could.

"Well, I'm afraid there are some gossiping birds about."

"Oh," and she laughed. "People will talk, you know."

"Yes, and tell no end of lies," he remarked.

"That's bad. People ought not to tell you lies, ought they?"

"No, of course not."

They did not have a lovers' quarrel, though they came very near it, as Sallie was an incorrigible tease. They kissed and parted, to meet and kiss again on the sly on the stairs before breakfast the next morning.

Durham was angry.

He suspected Joe of having told his sweetheart about finding him raking in the ashes of the fire that morning. That, coupled with his disappointment in not finding the diamond, caused him to indulge in a little bitterness toward the fireman.

"Ah!" he hissed, clenching his fist in the solitude of his attic room, "I'd like to punch his head for him, the meddlesome rascal."

But he well knew he could not indulge his malice to that extent. Joe would be more likely to turn the tables on him and punch his head instead. So he had to give up that idea altogether. But he resolved never more to say a word in favor of the "Prince of Firemen," and that, he believed, in his immensity of conceit, would eventually ruin him.

On his way uptown the next morning Durham met Tom Truman on the street. His face was a sight to look at. Both eyes were well frescoed in the highest style of pugilistic art. His nose was swollen out of shape, and bruise-spots all over his face showed how handy the firemen were with their "maulies."

"By George, Tom!" he exclaimed, as he gazed on the battered countenance of the detective, "you look as if you had tackled a cyclone!"

"I did," replied Tom, "and the cyclone got the best of it. But I am not done with it yet. Joe Jeckel will repent the longest day he lives that he ever set his 'Red Apple' friends on me. I could handle him, but not the whole company."

"Of course not. He got off with the diamond, though, and I'll bet he gets off with the girl who owns it."

"The girl doesn't own it," said Tom. "It belongs to Solomon Seegar, and——"

"But the judge gave it over to her, and that's nine points, you know. Joe is right after her. He is going to take her to Miss Atherby's house to-night to see the rich owner of the Atherby mills. She'll get a position in the mills, I guess."

"The idea of a poor mill-girl owning such a diamond as that! It's perfectly absurd."

"That's what I think. But she has it, for all that."

"Yes; but she won't keep it very long. There is a great deal of law for a man with a long purse."

"So there is. I hope the old man may get it, just to keep Jeckel from getting it."

"Ah! you don't like him any more than I do, then."

"No; I guess not."

"Does he know that?"

"No; I think not."

"Well, don't let a soul know that you saw me this morning, or he might think you gave me some information about himself or Miss Thorne. I want him to think I am laid up with my bruises for several days yet."

"Oh, I'll keep mum," and Durham laughed as he moved on up the street.

"Ah! I'll put a check on his game, or my name is not Tom

Truman," muttered the detective, as he walked briskly off down a cross street in the direction of the office of the old miser.

He found the old miser in, and the two retired to the little dingy back room and closed the door behind them. What passed between them there will be better understood by the reader hereafter.

They remained closeted together for nearly an hour, after which Tom came forth with a satisfied smile on his battered and bruised countenance. Even the old miser wore a look of satisfaction, and kept moving about like one whose mind was elsewhere than on the affairs of his estate.

Tom Truman lost no time in doing what he was paid for by old Solomon Seegar. He paid a visit to several saloons down near the river which were much frequented by tramps and disreputable characters.

In one of them he found a certain man he was in search of. They shook hands and then sat down to a small table in a corner to talk.

"I've got a job for you, Bill," said Tom, "in which there is money for you and some satisfaction for me."

"I'm your oyster, Tom," said the other, "for I am dead broke and don't know where I can get even a dinner to-day."

"Well, there's several good dinners in this job."

"I say, Tom, who did it?" Bill suddenly asked, surveying Tom's battered countenance.

"Well, there was a lot of 'em. I am going to get even with the whole gang; just lend me your ear till I give you the whole thing."

"All right; out with it. But I can't swallow it dry, you know."

"That's so. We'll have a bottle of good brandy," and he straightway ordered a bottle and two glasses to be placed on the table.

After taking a drink each, the two worthies talked in whispers for ten minutes, and then took another drink. They spent nearly an hour in that congenial occupation, after which Tom arose, buttoned up his coat, shook hands with Bill and left the saloon.

"Tom Truman is a good man," remarked Bill, lifting up the bottle and seeing that half the contents remained for him; "and Bill Butts is the man to stand by him through thick and thin as long as it pays. It don't pay to go back on Tom, as he has a grip with a sort of Sing Sing ring to it," and he poured out another drink of the fiery stuff and gulped it down.

That evening Joe Jeckel and Julia Thorne left Mrs. Bowen's boarding house to walk to the Atherby mansion not a dozen blocks away. The night was beautiful, clear and frosty.

"What a lovely night for a stroll," Julia exclaimed, taking his arm at the foot of the stoop.

"Yes. Romantic lovers could not ask for a better one," replied Joe. "If I had a sweetheart I would make it a rule to take her out every evening when the stars were out."

"Is it possible that you have no sweetheart?" she asked, in some surprise.

"Yes, it's true," he said. "But is there anything strange about that?"

"Yes, when there are so many pretty girls who would be glad to make a conquest of such a gallant as Mr. Jeckel."

"Ah! You can flatter well," and Joe laughed good-naturedly as they turned the corner together.

"Oh, I am telling the truth," she exclaimed. "You must be hard to please."

"Indeed I am not—on the contrary, I haven't fallen in love, that's all. I don't——"

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

"The fire bell!" gasped Julia. "You'll have to run!"

"Yes! Keep on down the street till you reach the Atherby

residence—in the sixth block from here!” and the next moment he was gone, leaving her standing alone on the sidewalk.

Men came hurrying by, some very much excited, anxious to know where the fire was. She stood there a minute or two, as if undecided what to do, when a carriage drove up to the curbstone, and a woman put her head out of the window, and asked:

“Can you tell me where the Atherby residence is?”

“Why, I am going there myself,” said Julia. “It is down this street here, about six blocks away, I believe.”

“Ah! If you are going there,” said the woman in the carriage, “you are welcome to a seat in my carriage. Will you accept it?”

The driver sprang from the box and held open the carriage door for her.

“Thanks,” said Julia. “You are kind,” and she entered the carriage and seated herself by the side of the stranger.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JULIA THORNE.

Joe Jeckel ran with all his speed to the engine house, reaching there in time to rush into his red shirt and fireman's hat. Trumpet in hand he dashed away at the head of his men for the third district, which lay nearly two miles away.

Away they dashed, and the other two companies were not very far behind them in the headlong rush.

In a few minutes they reached the district, asking eagerly of the few pedestrians they met where the fire was.

No one knew anything about a fire in that district, and no signs of one could be seen by the experienced firemen.

“It's a false alarm, boys,” said Ben Burke, after a short look round.

“Yes, false alarm,” said Joe. “Who could have done it, I wonder?”

“I'd like to punch the fellow's head for him,” remarked Jack Adams.

The other companies were equally disgusted, believing that somebody had sounded the alarm for the purpose of playing a joke on them.

They turned about and returned leisurely to their quarters. As firemen they were used to such trials, and did not long growl or grumble over what could not well be avoided.

As soon as he could doff his red shirt and fireman's hat Joe did so and started for the Atherby residence.

He was shown into the reception-room and his card taken up to the hostess.

Celia Atherby sent little Bessie down to see him and entertain him with her childish prattle till she could put in an appearance. Little Bessie had grown to be very fond of him, and had won his whole heart by her sprightliness.

At last Miss Atherby appeared and gave him a cordial welcome.

“But where is Miss Thorne?” she asked. “I had expected that she would come with you.”

Joe sprang to his feet.

“Is she not with you?” he asked.

“I have not seen her,” was the reply.

“Well, that's strange. We started out together. When about half way here the fire alarm called me away.”

“Yes; I heard it,” said Miss Atherby, “and thought that neither of you would call.”

“The alarm proved to be a false one,” Joe said. “But when I left her I told her to keep on down the street till she found the house, thinking that anyone she might meet could give her the proper directions. She may have returned home, though I can't see why she should.”

“She may have been alarmed by the alarm bell,” said Miss Atherby, “and thought it best to return home.”

“With your permission I'll go back after her. It is not too late.”

“Certainly. I would like very much to see her.”

Joe kissed little Bessie and then bowed himself out. He lost no time in getting back to Mrs. Bowen's, as he was anxious that the two ladies should get acquainted with each other.

He met Mrs. Bowen at the foot of the stairs.

“Did Miss Thorne come back after the alarm of fire?” he asked.

“Why, no; she has not been back since you took her away.”

“The deuce!” gasped Joe.

“Why, nothing's wrong, I hope?” exclaimed the old lady.

“Well, I don't know. I was compelled to leave her on the street and run for the fire, telling her how to find Miss Atherby's residence. After returning from the engine house I went to Miss Atherby's and found that she had not been there. It's very strange. I don't understand it.”

“Oh, I guess she thought the fire would detain you a long time, and so made up her mind to visit some of her girl friends instead of the lady she intended to see.”

“Perhaps she did, but I doubt it. I don't think she would do that, as she knew she was expected at Miss Atherby's.”

“Well, I can't see why she didn't go there, then. I hope no harm has befallen her.”

Joe was in a great worry.

“She may not have found the house as readily as I could have done,” he said to himself as he turned to retrace his footsteps back to the Atherby residence. He wandered up and down the street for some time, and then called at the Atherbys' to ask if she had shown up.

She had not.

“By George!” he exclaimed, “I don't understand it at all. It's the strangest thing that ever happened to Appleton to have a young lady mysteriously disappear right in the heart of the town. Surely no foul play can have occurred, for I left her right in front of Judge Walton's residence. Mrs. Bowen may be right in her conjectures, after all. She may have gone to see some friends, thinking the fire would keep me away maybe all night long. I'll go to the chief of police and report the matter to him.”

The chief was amazed.

“Did she have that diamond in her possession?” he asked.

“No; she placed that in the bank at my suggestion,” Joe replied.

“Ah, I am glad of that. She may have called on some friends. You had better wait till morning, and see if she turns up.”

“Well, I'll do so if you think best,” he said, “but it's the strangest thing that ever happened to me.”

“Did she have any other valuables with her?” the chief asked.

“She had a small sum of money—something less than a hundred dollars, I believe.”

The chief shook his head and suggested that he wait till morning for a solution of the problem. Joe went away, but not to his home. He was not the man to give up in the service of innocent women.

“I'll walk up and down Shelby avenue,” he said. “She may have been lost or gone to see some friend. In either case she may ask some one to see her home. I would rather be on the lookout for her.”

Up and down the avenue and adjacent streets he wandered till long after midnight. He met a number of people going in various directions, but none resembled the fair girl he was in search of.

At a very late hour he passed two men, one of whom looked hard at him and then passed on. He did not seem to notice

them, though both of them stopped and whispered a few hurried words to each other.

As he turned and wandered back down the street he saw the two men coming toward him; but he did not take them in his mind. He was thinking of the missing girl as he went past them.

As they passed one of them wheeled and dealt him a tremendous blow on the head with a sand club, felling him senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FAIR MAID IN THE TOILS.

When Julia Thorne entered the carriage of the strange lady on invitation she felt exceedingly fortunate. She did not like being alone in the streets when excited men were running hither and thither in quest of the fire which had been proclaimed by the great fire bell.

"Do you know where the fire is?" the strange lady asked as the carriage drove off.

"No, I do not," she answered. "I was escorted by a gentleman who belongs to one of the fire companies. He had to leave me. That's why I was alone on the sidewalk."

"That was unfortunate," said the lady.

"Yes—for we were going to call on Miss Atherby. She will be disappointed in not seeing him, I fear."

"Who was the gentleman?"

"Mr. Jeckel."

"Ah! I have heard of him. He is very popular with the ladies, is he not?"

"I believe so."

The strange lady kept Julia so busy talking that she did not notice that the carriage had gone far beyond the Atherby mansion. The truth is, it had been so long since she had indulged in the pleasure of a carriage ride that she forgot to take any note of time.

Suddenly she noticed that the gaslights were more scattered, and that the houses were not such as the rich people of Appleton lived in. She put her face to the window and looked out.

"We have gone past the place!" she exclaimed, in sudden alarm.

"Have we? I will speak to the coachman," and the woman moved as if she was about to open the door of the vehicle. Instead of doing so, she turned and clapped a handkerchief to Julia's face, holding it there with great firmness.

The young seamstress made a quick and violent attempt to dislodge the handkerchief, as it was saturated with something which emitted a pungent odor.

As her head struck against the back of the carriage she grasped the handkerchief with both hands and pulled it away. The woman sprang up, grasped her by the throat, and clapped the handkerchief to her face again.

She tried to scream.

She tried to slide down from the seat to the floor of the vehicle, but as she made the attempt she felt her senses leaving her.

In another moment she passed into the oblivion of utter unconsciousness.

When she came to she found herself lying on a bed in a strange room with an ugly, repulsive-featured woman near by.

She rubbed her eyes and gazed around the room like one just waking out of a deep sleep.

But the more she rubbed her eyes the more mystified she became. She could not remember ever having seen the room or woman before.

"You feel better now?" the old crone asked.

"I don't know. Where am I?"

"You are here in the Home," said the old crone.

"Home! What home?"

"The Home for Afflicted Women and Girls."

Julia was struck speechless with astonishment.

She glared around the room again, and actually pinched herself to see if she were not dreaming. But she was awake, as the pinch proved, and, after a pause of several minutes, turned to the old crone and asked:

"How long have I been here?"

"About four weeks, child," was the quiet reply.

"Four weeks!" She sprang up in bed and gazed at the woman as though she were one from the dead.

"How did I come here?" she asked.

"You came in a carriage with a doctor and an officer. The judge sent you here to be kept till you were cured."

"Cured! Cured of what?"

The old woman looked at her and shook her head.

"You are better now," she said, "and I am glad of it. Does your head hurt you any to-day?"

Julia turned deathly pale and dropped back on the bed. The suspicion that she had been entrapped and lodged in a mad-house flashed through her mind.

Everything seemed so like a dream that for several minutes she could not collect her thoughts. In a mad-house! It could not seem possible. She knew she was not insane. Her consciousness was too strong for that. Yet she was in a strange place—a home of some kind—and could not recollect how or when she came there.

The old woman arose and moved about the room like one accustomed to the house. Julia followed her with her eyes, her brain in a perfect whirl the while. Such a flood of ideas rushed upon her that she gave utterance to none—not knowing what to say.

At last the old woman passed out of the room and closed the door after her. Julia sprang up and ran to the door to lock it, and thus bar the old crone out.

She found it already locked on the other side.

The discovery staggered her. She almost reeled across the room to the one window which looked out upon a garden.

Horror of horrors! The window was barred, like that of a strong prison, with heavy iron bars.

She seized one of the bars with both hands and exerted all her strength against it. But it was immovable, and she stepped back, a hopeless despair tugging at her heart.

"I am a prisoner in a mad-house," she moaned. "I am not mad, but to stay here would make me so. Oh, what does it all mean? How has it come about?"

She sank down into a chair and gave herself up to the hardest thinking she ever did in her life.

"That old woman spoke falsely," she said, after a pause of several minutes. "I have not been here as long as she says. I was brought here insensible last night. That strange woman in the carriage is at the bottom of all. There was some powerful drug in the handkerchief which overpowered my senses. I felt my senses slipping away from me, and then a blank followed. Yes; I recollect it all now. But what does it mean? Can that old miser have anything to do with it?"

Here she felt in her pocket.

"Oh, Charlie's diamond!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet and feeling in the pocket of her dress. Suddenly she drew a breath of relief. She remembered that she had deposited the precious stone in the bank the day before.

"Ah! I am so glad Mr. Jeckel advised me to put it in the bank! It would have been lost. Oh, my money is gone! I—I can't find it!" and she made a hurried examination of her dress pocket.

Not a cent could she find of all the money sent her by the brave firemen.

Then she burst into tears, a woman's last refuge and solace.

"Oh, what have I done that I should be so treated!" she moaned. "Will this mystery never end?"

Burying her face in her hands, she wept a long time. Tears relieved her, and after the crying spell she was in a better condition to face the situation.

By and by the key on the other side of the door turned in the lock and the old woman entered.

"Oh, you are up, are you?" the old hag asked, as she entered and glanced around the room.

"Yes. I am up. I've been looking for the money that was in my pocket last night, and can't find it. Do you know anything about it?"

The old woman looked at her in silence for a minute or two, and then shook her head.

"You don't know?" Julia asked.

"No. You must be mistaken. You didn't have any money last night, my child. You have been——"

"Oh, I know better. You needn't talk to me about how long I've been here. I know all about that. I was brought here in a carriage last night, after having been drugged by one of my own sex. My pocket has been rifled of every cent I had in the world."

The old woman simply looked at her and shook her head.

"Poor child," she finally murmured, "your head is not right yet. But you must not excite yourself, or the doctor will order them to put you in the padded room!"

Julia actually gasped for breath, and sank down into the chair again. Her face was pallid, and a horrible fear came over her.

She had read stories depicting the horrors of mad-houses, and now she stood on the very brink of those horrors, liable at any moment to fall into them. The padded room was for the confinement of those whose malady urged them to personal violence to themselves. She had heard of them. No wonder she shuddered and gasped for breath!

The old woman seated herself in another chair and gazed at her. She was tall and angular, with a face that was very much like old Solomon Seegar, the miser. Julia did not notice the resemblance till this moment. Then the thought flashed through her mind that perhaps she was his sister. The resemblance was very strong.

The old woman seemed quite anxious to get on good terms with her. She tried to get up a pleasant expression of countenance, and finally said:

"I am sorry you lost your money. But do you know, I think the manager of the Home knows where it is?"

"Indeed! Is he the robber?"

"No, not a robber. Patients are searched when brought here, and everything of value taken away from them, to be returned when they leave cured."

"Ah!"

"Yes. If you wish I'll see if your money has been kept for you."

"If you please."

"Then I'll go now and ask. The record must be in the office."

The old woman arose and left the room, closing and locking the door after her.

"My God!" groaned Julia, burying her face in her hands. "That ugly old thing's face will kill me! It haunts me all the time. I've seen it before somewhere in the long ago, and can't recall it. It is full of evil, and her heart, if she has one, is a wicked one. Oh, how can I get away from this horrible place?"

She arose from the chair and paced the room like one in a frenzy of nervous excitement. It was thus the old woman found her when she returned to the room.

"Your money is safe," she said, "and will be returned to you when you leave the Home."

"But when can I leave?" Julia eagerly asked.

"That's for the doctor to say. I know nothing about your case myself. What does an old nurse like me know of people's maladies?"

"Could you aid me to escape from this place? I'd willingly give you all the money they took from me if——"

"No—no—no!" said the old woman, shaking her head. "I could, but—but——"

"But what! Speak, woman!" and the excited girl sprang forward and caught the old crone's arm and held to it like a plank.

"That money would not pay me one tenth as much as I would lose if I suffered you to escape."

Julia gave a groan of despair and fell back into the chair.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAND-BAGGED.

When Joe Jeckel was felled to the ground by a sand-club on the night of Julia Thorne's disappearance, he was left there alone. His assailants fled, and a half hour later a night watchman ran across him on his rounds.

The watchman did not recognize him, and quite naturally took him to be one who had been overcome by too much drink. But he did not shirk his duty under the circumstances. He whistled for help, and a policeman responded.

"What's up—a drunk?" the policeman asked, as he came up.

"Don't know—guess so," was the reply. "He's a well-dressed drunk if he is."

The officer turned his face toward the figure and flashed his lantern upon it. He started as if stung, and exclaimed:

"Why, it's Joe Jeckel!"

"Gosh! is that so?"

"Yes. I know him well. Say, we must get him to the hospital as soon as possible. He isn't dead yet."

One of them remained on the spot while the other ran to the nearest station to summon an ambulance.

The vehicle came after a time, and he was taken up and carried to the same hospital at which he had been treated before.

The surgeon was called up by one of the nurses. He was astonished at seeing Joe back under his charge so soon.

The policeman told where he had been found, and then the surgeon began an examination. The sand-bag leaves but slight signs of its use—only a weak discoloration where the blood settles.

But the experienced surgeon soon determined the nature of the weapon that had been used.

"Sand-bag," he said, and then took steps to restore consciousness to his patient.

That was not such an easy thing to do. The concussion had gone through his whole frame, clear down to his heels. He seemed far more dead than alive, and the doctor shook his head as he looked at him.

But the surgeon was not a man to give up as long as a glimmer of hope remained. After several hours of hard work he succeeded in starting the circulation again, and a little later Joe opened his eyes and looked up at the doctor. His thoughts were badly scattered, however, and it was some time before he could be made to understand that he was in the hospital again.

"How do you feel now?" the surgeon asked him after breakfast.

Joe looked hard at him and asked in return:

"Have they found her?"

"Found who?"

"The young lady—Julia Thorne?"

"Why, where is she? What's the matter with her?" the bewildered surgeon asked.

Joe looked all around the room, as if in search of her. Then he turned again and asked:

"Have they found her?"

"We know nothing of her here," replied the doctor, shaking his head. "We have your case to look after now."

"What's the matter with me?" he asked, in some surprise.

"You've been sand-bagged."

Joe started.

"Sand-bagged!" he exclaimed, raising a hand to his head.

"Ah! I remember feeling a terrible shock, as if a thunderbolt had dropped on me, and that's all I can recollect."

"Well, you are lucky to recollect that much, I think. You were found lying insensible on the ground on James street about two o'clock this morning, and sent here in an ambulance. You are lucky in being alive at this moment."

Joe closed his eyes and tried to think. He recollected passing two men just a moment before the awful shock sent him to earth. But he took no notice of them, his thoughts being so much engrossed by the object of his search.

"How do you feel?" the doctor asked.

"All broke up," he replied. "Can you pull me though, doctor?"

"Yes, I think we can."

"Do it, then, and let me know if they find her. Send word to Miss Celia Atherby and also to my landlady, Mrs. Bowen."

The doctor called in a messenger and wrote a note to each of the ladies he mentioned, and sent them off.

Celia Atherby was at breakfast when the note was handed to her. She was thrown almost into a spasm of nervous excitement by the news that Julia Thorne had not been found, and that Joe Jeckel had been picked up insensible on the street and sent to the hospital.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed. "What will happen next, I wonder?" and she explained the situation to her sister Myra.

The widow shrugged her beautiful shoulders and asked:

"Why do you bother about such people? They can't do you any good."

"Because I wish to do them good," she replied. "They are worthy people. Mr. Jeckel is a hero in every sense of the word. He saved the girl's life, and has been trying to protect her ever since the story of her uncut diamond came out. I am going to the hospital to see him, and get all the information I can. I am deeply interested in that girl, Myra."

"Ah! You are interested more in the 'Red Apple' fireman, I guess," remarked the widow.

"Why should I not be? He is the only real hero in the town, near as I can judge."

"Quite complimentary to your gentlemen acquaintances, I'm sure."

Celia made no reply, but hastened up to her room to dress for the visit to the hospital. By the time she was ready the carriage was before the door.

A half hour later she entered the hospital and was shown to the bedside of the young "Prince of Firemen."

Joe was asleep. She would not permit them to disturb him.

"Let him sleep," she said in low tones. "I can wait. Is he much hurt?"

"It was a bad hurt, and came very near ending him," replied the doctor.

She gave a shudder as she turned and gazed on the pale face of the sleeping fireman.

Joe suddenly opened his eyes and saw who his fair visitor was.

"I am back in my old quarters again," he said, after greeting her cordially.

"Yes, and the doctor says you came very near going out to the cemetery."

"Well, I got half way, I suppose," and he smiled as he raised a hand to his head. Then he asked:

"Have they found her?"

"No, she has not been seen."

A look of pain swept over his face.

"Where do you suppose she is?" she asked.

"I have no idea."

"She may have been spirited away for the purpose of robbery."

"She had nothing with her but a little money in her purse. That diamond was deposited in the bank yesterday, and is safe. The bank ought not to give it up except to her in person."

"I'll see that it is kept for her alone," said Miss Atherby.

"Thanks. She has no friends or relatives in this city."

"She has friends in you and me," said Miss Atherby.

"Yes, yes; she is blessed in your friendship. She wanted so much to see you," and Joe looked up at the beautiful woman as if he regarded her as something more than human.

"I shall engage the best detectives that can be found," said Miss Atherby, "and instruct them to spare no expense in the search for her."

"How good and generous you are!" he exclaimed. "If there were more like you the world would be brighter for many poor people. Your presence here and interest in——"

"Oh, don't flatter me right here before the doctor," she said, interrupting him, "or he might think you worse than you are, and physic you accordingly."

"He is too good a physician to make such a mistake," was the quick reply.

"Ah! There's one for you, doctor! Yet you don't blush," and she laughed provokingly at the handsome surgeon.

"Yes, and it's a good one," said the doctor. "If you'll repeat it I'll blush like a rose as it falls from your lips."

"Oh, then I won't do it. A man is a hardened wretch when no one but a woman can make him blush."

"Oh, Lord! That settles you, doc," and Joe laughed heartily at the surgeon's expense.

"Yes," replied the doctor, "for the present! just wait. He laughs best who laughs last."

"Forgive me, doctor," she said, extending her hand toward him. "I didn't mean it."

"Of course you didn't. It was but the natural sharpness of your tongue. You couldn't help it," and he offered her his arm to escort her out to her carriage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE TRAIL—"SAVE ME! SAVE ME!"

The sudden disappearance of Julia Thorne and the deadly assault on Joe Jeckel created the wildest excitement in Appleton. People were so indignant that they talked of a fund by subscription as a reward for the arrest of the guilty parties. As the young lady had started on a visit to Miss Celia Atherby, the latter sent for the mayor and authorized him to offer one thousand dollars reward for her safe return and arrest of her abductors.

The mayor very promptly complied with her request, and the excitement rose to fever heat. All the detectives at once set to work on the case. The busiest of all was Tom Truman.

In the meantime Joe slowly recovered from the effects of the terrible sand-bagging. He was prostrated by the shock more than by the fall in the snowbank, when he rescued little Effie Cathey from the burning building.

But his naturally strong constitution pulled him through, and on the third day he was able to leave the hospital and return to his own quarters. Yet he felt shaky on his legs, and did not attempt any violent exercise.

A week passed, and still Julia Thorne had not been heard from. The reward of a thousand dollars had set the detectives at work, but as they had no clues to go upon they remained in the dark. Every one had a theory of his own and ventilated it freely. No two agreed theoretically.

In the meantime Joe Jeckel had recovered his usual strength and spirits. He went to his employer and begged for a two weeks' vacation. The warm-hearted man promptly granted his request. He then went back home and prepared for a visit down to New York city.

The next day he returned from the metropolis, where he had been changed into an old gray-haired, white-bearded man, apparently sixty years of age. The disguise was perfect, as he went around among a number of his most intimate friends. None of them suspected his identity.

"Ah!" he said. "They will not suspect the quiet old man of being Joe Jeckel," and he looked around at many people he knew as he passed along the street. "I will get on to Truman's trail now, and see where it will lead. If he is not concerned in the girl's disappearance I am sure he knows who sand-bagged me."

That evening he kept an eye on the detective, and saw him leave his quarters and stroll down Hudson avenue. He made up his mind to follow him. He took the other side of the avenue and made his way in the same direction, but as one who did not even appear to know that the other man was even in existence.

The chase led clear out beyond the limits of the town.

"Oh, ho!" thought Joe. "This means something. An adventure, if nothing more. I am your shadow, Tom Truman. Go ahead."

After going about a half mile beyond the town limits Truman seemed to think it strange that an old man should be taking such a walk in that direction at the same time as he did. He stopped and gazed at the old man. The starlight was just clear enough for him to make out that it was an old man.

To satisfy himself Tom crossed over and accosted him with:

"Say, are you acquainted in this neighborhood?"

"Yes, a little. Why? Are you lost?"

"Well, no, not exactly lost, for I know my way back, at least. Do you know where Dan Griswold's place is?"

"Yes, about a half mile further on. A big white house on the right hand side. Going there?"

"Yes. How far are you going?"

"I am just walking for air and exercise. Don't know how far I shall go."

"Do you think you will go as far as Dan's place?"

"Don't know. I may, and then I may not. If I feel too fatigued I shall turn back. If not, I may go even beyond Dan's."

Tom seemed puzzled.

"Why do you ask?" the old man asked, after a pause.

"Because, if you go that far, I would ask a favor at your hands."

"What is that?"

"That you leave a note there for me, and let me go back to town."

"Oh, I couldn't do that, sir. Dan and I are not friends by any means. We once had a law-suit."

"Then I shall have to go on," said Tom in a vexed tone of voice.

"The walk will do you good. I'll go part, if not all the way with you."

They trudged along, talking of everything of current interest.

Joe so well disguised his voice that Tom never suspected his identity. Yet he was evidently annoyed at the cool leisure of the old man, who said his name was Bacon. He wondered he never met this Bacon before, and was about to ask how it was he had not, when both were startled by cries in a shrill female voice:

"Help! Help! Oh, for God's sake help!"

The next moment a woman came running toward them, crying out:

"Save me! Don't let her touch me!"

She was pursued by another woman, a tall angular old woman, who dashed up and caught her, saying harshly:

"Come back, you young hussy! I'll teach you to run away!"

Tom stood irresolute, but Joe sprang forward and caught hold of the young girl, who clung to him, crying:

"Oh, save me, good sir! I am not mad—I am——"

"My God! It's Julia Thorne!" exclaimed Joe.

"Yes—yes—save me! Save me!"

Tom Truman sprang at the old man, with a gleaming knife in his upraised hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN.

When the old woman declared that the money which had been taken from the pocket of her dress was not enough to purchase a chance of escape, Julia Thorne felt her heart sink in her breast like a lump of lead. Her last hope was gone. She felt like giving up in despair and ending the wretchedness of her life by suicide.

Seated in the chair once more, she gazed at the old woman like one in the depths of hopeless despair. The old crone tried to make her believe that she sympathized with her. But the young seamstress turned away from her in profound disgust.

"You can escape easy enough," the old woman finally said, "if you only secure me pay for one year."

"How? What do you mean by pay for one year?" Julia asked.

"I mean this: If you escape, I would be held responsible for it, and my discharge would be the result."

"Oh, it could be managed so as not to reflect on you!" exclaimed Julia.

"No; carelessness would be charged to me, and I would lose my situation. An old woman like me could not easily find another. If you could pay me \$1,000, or give me——"

"Oh, God!" groaned Julia, in anguish as well as dismay. "That money they took from me is all I have in the world."

"Are you sure of that? I heard them say down in the office that they found a little bank book in your possession which showed a diamond on deposit."

Julia turned pale and red by turns.

"Have you not heard the story of that diamond?" she asked.

"No; what is it?"

Julia then gave her the history of it, ending with:

"So you see it is not mine. It is his—sent to me to keep till he comes back."

"But if he never comes back? Seven years is a long time to wait. He will never return, so it is yours."

Julia shook her head.

"His property is not mine," she would say, "but a sacred trust in my hands, and shall ever remain so."

The old woman's eyes flashed, but the young maiden did not see them.

"Well, I am sorry. I can't afford to lose my situation for the paltry sum in your purse in the office," she finally remarked.

Julia made no reply.

She was thinking of him to whom she had been true so long.

No power on earth could have induced her to part with the trust he had confided to her hands. Hers was a love that never faltered, and her faith in the constancy of her lover was as unshaken as the eternal hills.

After waiting a while longer the old woman arose and left the room, locking the door after her.

Julia dropped back into the chair and rocked to and fro in bitterest anguish. Her tears flowed long and copiously, and when they ceased the dark mantle of night had closed around her.

Hour after hour passed, and still she sat there, waiting for the old woman to reappear with a light. But she waited in vain. The old crone never came.

At last, tired, hungry and sleepy, she threw herself on the bed and cried herself to sleep.

She was awakened by hearing some one moving about in her room. On looking around she saw the old woman placing a small tray on a little table in a corner of the room. On the tray she noticed a cup of tea, two pieces of toast and a piece of butter.

"How is your head this morning?" the old crone asked, on seeing her awake.

"My head doesn't trouble me in the least," was the reply, as she arose and looked at the tray, "but my stomach does, for I am very hungry."

"I am glad your appetite has come back to you," the old woman said. "For a whole week you wouldn't touch a morsel of anything."

"Can you get me a basin of water? I wish to wash my face and hands."

"Yes, I'll get you some," and the old crone left the room, locking the door after her.

"Oh, will she ever forget to turn that detestable key?" moaned Julia. "It makes my blood run cold every time I hear it turn in the lock."

By and by the water came, and the fair prisoner had the pleasure of bathing her face and hands for the first time in nearly two days. Then she sat down and ate the simple meal that had been provided.

During the meal the old woman stood near the window which overlooked the garden beyond. Julia could not avoid watching her as she stood there. The profile of that ugly face stirred up the ashes of her memory to such an extent that she suddenly asked:

"Will you tell me your name?"

The old crone seemed surprised, and turned square around and faced her.

"Why do you wish to know my name?" she asked. "A poor old nurse like me don't amount to anything."

"Your face seems strangely familiar to me," said Julia. "I have seen you before somewhere. Your face is in the rubbish of my memory, and I have been trying to recall where it was that I saw you."

"I don't think you ever saw me till you came here a month ago."

"You mean till last night but one," suggested Julia.

"No; I mean a month ago. You have never been able to seem rational till yesterday morning. Maybe my face may seem familiar to you on that account."

"Have you ever been in England?" Julia asked, paying no attention to the old crone's lying.

"Eh? What? England?" exclaimed the old woman, as much startled as if a dynamite bomb had exploded at her feet. "I—no, I never was in England?"

Julia watched every expression of the old crone's face. She never took her eyes off her. The old woman moved away from the window as if to prevent any further study of her features,

and sat down in a chair nearest the corner of the room. She seemed averse to any more conversation on the subject, and asked:

"Shall I bring you another piece of toast?"

"No, thanks. I've eaten enough. If you wish to do me a kind act, tell me how long you think I will be kept here."

"How can I tell? Who can say? When you are cured, or pronounced cured by the doctor in charge, you will be allowed to leave, and not before."

"The idea is that I am insane, is it not?"

"Yes; the judge ordered you to be sent here, to remain until cured."

Julia said no more.

She arose and paced the floor while the old woman placed the things back on the tray and took them out of the room, not forgetting to lock the door after her.

"O God!" groaned Julia, "this is horrible! I prefer death to this awful suspense. I know I shall do something desperate."

The day passed, and the old woman did not make her appearance till sunset. Then she brought in more tea and toast.

Thus a whole week passed, and the fair prisoner made up her mind to escape or die. She determined to make an attack on the old woman, and dart out of the house and run for life ere she could recover from her surprise.

Accordingly, she went to work to wrench off a leg from the little table in the room. When she had done that and secured the leg she swung it about as a club for some time, trying to see how best she could use it.

That evening she stood by the door when she heard the old woman coming with the tray.

As soon as the door opened the table leg descended on the old crone's head with a force that sent visions of stars through her head, and the supper tray skimming across the room.

The next moment Julia Thorne darted past her, and flew along a corridor, at the end of which was a door. That she quickly opened, and sprang out into the frosty air. Then she fled at the top of her speed, going she knew not where. The next moment she heard some one pursuing her, and she screamed for help.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUEL TO THE DEATH—JOE RESCUES JULIA THORNE.

When the disguised fireman saw the detective's upraised knife about to descend upon him, he drew back his good right hand and gave the villain a blow on the chest that sent him reeling backward several feet. Then he pushed Julia aside, saying:

"Wait till I punish the villain!"

But ere the detective could rally to the attack, the old woman had seized the young girl and held her with an iron grip.

Julia screamed for help in her terror. She was helpless as an infant in the old woman's grasp.

"Hands off, old woman!"

The old woman aimed a pistol at his head, holding it so close to his face that he actually scented the powder.

Quick as a flash his right hand shot out straight from the shoulder, landing on the old woman's cheek.

Down she went like a log.

"Take that, you old hag!" hissed Joe, and the next moment Tom Truman was on him again with his murderous knife.

"Who are you?" Tom hissingly demanded.

"I am Joe Jeckel, you villain, and you have got to the end

of your row," and the young hero drew his knife and prepared to fight with the daring detective.

Truman evidently suspected his identity when he asked the question, and now exclaimed:

"Take care of yourself!"

"Never mind about me," said Joe, parrying a blow and making one in return.

"Oh, God, help my protector!" cried Julia, in her terror, as she saw the two determined men warily parrying for a death blow at each other.

"Keep out of the way, Julia!" said Joe, not taking his eyes off his antagonist a moment. "Take the old woman's pistol from her—quick!"

Julia did not wait for another word, but sprang forward and bent over the prostrate form of the old woman.

She saw the revolver lying where it had fallen when the old crone went down, and promptly picked it up.

The old woman had been so hard hit that it took her several minutes to pull herself together again. When she did the duel between Joe Jeckel and Tom Truman was furiously raging.

Round and round they moved, both wary, and at the same time as fierce as two tigers. Suddenly Tom made a desperate lunge at Joe's chest. But the blow was parried, and Tom's foot slipped.

Down he went, and was at the mercy of the brave fireman.

"Get up," said Joe. "I never strike a man when he is down!"

Tom sprang to his feet, and, without uttering a word, renewed the combat.

At one time their blades met above their heads and a stream of sparks flashed from them. Julia trembled from head to foot, but held the revolver steadily at the head of the prostrate old woman.

By and by the young girl grew so absorbed in the death struggle that was going on within a few feet of her that she forgot the old wretch who was lying at her feet. The old crone saw how absorbed she was, and at once took steps to make her escape from the dangerous locality.

She dared not rise up on her feet and thus invite a shot from the pistol in Julia Thorne's hand. But her low cunning suggested another and safer way to escape. That was to crawl away, and she did so, under the cover of darkness and the terrible death struggle that was going on so near at hand.

At last Tom thought he saw an opening in Joe's guard, and quickly rushed in, only to receive a deep cut in his left shoulder.

"That's one!" hissed Joe. "I'll give you another presently."

Tom made no reply.

He was breathing hard and fast.

The cool confidence and tantalizing way of the dauntless fireman made him wish he had not begun the fight. To retreat now was out of the question. He had to kill or be killed, and he resolved to fight to the death.

Again he made a rush to get inside of Joe's guard, and was caught on the point of Joe's blade.

"I'm killed!" burst from Truman's lips, as he staggered away a few paces. Joe watched him, suspicious of a trick. But Tom staggered about, trying to keep his feet; in a minute or so he dropped, falling all in a heap.

"Saved!" cried the seamstress, rushing forward and throwing herself into his arms.

"Where's the old woman?" Joe asked, not seeing her anywhere.

Julia sprang from him and looked around for her late prisoner.

"Oh, Heavens!" she gasped, "she has escaped, and I didn't see her!"

"Well, it makes no difference," said Joe, looking cautiously

around in search of the old crone. "If she is gone we are glad to get rid of her."

"Yes. I hope I shall never see her ugly old face again. Is he dead?"

"I think so. He is very still and quiet."

"Oh, this is horrible!" and the young girl shuddered. "Please take me away?"

She clung to him as if he were her only hope in life. He caught her arm and held her firmly, saying:

"Have no fear now. I'll stand by you as long as I have life."

"I don't doubt you in the least. Are you hurt?"

"No, I don't think I am. Can you tell me where you have been all this week past?"

"I have been a prisoner in a house which they said was a home for women and girls," was the reply.

"Well, it's the strangest thing I ever heard of," said Joe.

"Yes, and the old woman tried to make me believe that I had been out of my head, and that the judge had sent me to the home to be cured. She said I had been there a month when I came to the next morning. But I knew better, and told her so. They robbed me of every cent of the money the firemen gave me, and now I am penniless again."

"Don't let that trouble you," said Joe. "You have more friends now than ever before in your life. Miss Atherby is so much interested in you that she authorized the mayor to offer one thousand dollars reward for your recovery."

"Oh, how can I repay such kindness? I don't deserve it!" and she began to cry.

"Yes, you do. You deserve all your friends can do for you. That thousand dollars' reward will fall to me. I shall turn it over to you, and——"

"Oh, Lord, Mr. Jeckel!" she gasped, "a thousand dollars! Why, it's a fortune!"

"I'm glad you think so. We are going to Miss Atherby's now. I think we had better go there first."

Joe led the young seamstress to the Atherby mansion, where he revealed his identity and told the story of Julia Thorne's rescue.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACCUSING THE OLD MISER.

Leaving Julia Thorne to the hospitality of Celia Atherby, Joe Jeckel made his way to police headquarters. The chief had not gone home.

"Hello, Joe!" the chief exclaimed, for the young fireman had thrown aside his disguise. "What's up now? You didn't go to the fire to-night!"

"No, but I have found Julia Thorne."

"The deuce you say! Where is she?"

"At the Atherbys'."

"Where has she been, and how did you find her?" the chief asked.

"She has been held a close prisoner in a house on the outskirts of Appleton. She escaped from the house by making a club of a table leg and welting an old woman over the head with it. I was disguised, following Tom Truman, when she ran toward us, chased by the old woman, crying for help. I recognized her voice and interfered to save her, when Tom attacked me with a knife. I knocked the old woman out with one blow of my fist, and then turned my attention to Tom. We fought some ten minutes, I should judge, when my blade rubbed against him, and that ended him."

"Good Heavens! you don't mean to tell me you have killed Tom Truman, do you?"

"Yes; that's the impression I desire to make on your mind," said Joe. "You can find him out on the river road, about a

half mile beyond the village line. But come out with me, and I'll show you where he lies."

"I can't go, Joe, but I'll send Sergeant Emmet and Officer Hicks with you, with the ambulance."

"All right; send Em along. It was the toughest fight I ever had. Tom was determined to wipe me out, and at one time I thought he would do so, but luck was against him."

Joe went with the two officers, and they found the dead body where it had been left. They took it up and carried it to the police station.

Though it was midnight when the body arrived at the station, quite a crowd was on hand to see it. The news had spread quickly, and quite a number of people got out of their beds to go down to the station to get the particulars.

"I say, chief, shall I surrender to you?" Joe asked of the chief of police.

"I don't think you should," was the reply, "as the fight was not in my jurisdiction. You had better give yourself up to the sheriff."

"All right. Where is he?"

"At home in bed," said some one in the crowd.

"Well, I'll go down to his house and give myself up," remarked Joe.

"Oh, go home and go to bed," said the chief. "A man has the right to defend himself anywhere. Go home and go to bed."

The next day all Appleton was in a fever of excitement. People could not understand why Detective Truman should be concerned in the abduction, unless it was for the purpose of trying to get possession of the diamond which Julia Thorne had kept so long, in anticipation of the return of her lover.

Joe was kept busy the next day telling how the thing happened. Not a soul in all the town had a word of blame for him.

"You say Truman was hired by Seegar to work up the diamond case?" the chief asked.

"Yes, I know it."

"Then the old rascal knows something about that abduction."

"I think so, too; but we have no proof of it," said Joe.

"Exactly. He may escape after all. I would like to see him and ask him a few questions, anyhow."

"So would I," added Joe. "I think he would do anything to get possession of that diamond. Julia says the old woman who had charge of her looked enough like old Solomon to be his sister, though she was much the uglier of the two."

"I never heard that he had a sister," remarked the chief.

"Did you ever hear anything about him before he came here twenty years ago?"

"No, nor where he came from, either."

"Well, I want to call on him," said Joe, "and I want you to go with me."

"What do you want to see him about, Joe?" the chief asked.

"I want to suggest to him that he employ an honest, decent man as detective hereafter."

The chief laughed and said he would go with him, and they left his office together.

The old miser was found in his office, hat on, and a severe bruise under one eye, which had gone into mourning.

The old skinflint turned pale and became almost too weak to stand when the two men entered his office. But he was a stern old man. He glared at Joe, and asked:

"What do you want here, sir?"

"I want you, old man," replied Joe, looking him full in the face.

"Want—me!"

"Yes. Your man Truman is dead, and——"

"No, no, he was not my man!" exclaimed the old man, interrupting him. "I deny it! He was a detective, and worked on

his own responsibility. I am not responsible for any of his acts."

"But I happen to know better, old man. You agreed to pay Tom \$100 per month to work up the diamond case against me. He went into the abduction business, and now you had better own up and make a clean breast of it."

The old miser turned pale as death at Joe's words, and, dropping into a seat, exclaimed:

"Before Heaven! I don't know what you are talking about, Joe Jeckel!"

"Where did you get the black eye?" Joe asked.

"I ran against the door last night, and hurt myself," was the reply.

"Oh! come off, now, old man. Tom was in your employ. He was working for you, and no one else, or——"

Clang! Clang! Clang! went the great fire bell, and Joe Jeckel turned and ran down the steps as fast as his heels could carry him, leaving the chief of police alone with the old miser.

Clang! Clang! went two more strokes of the great bell, and then the old miser sprang to his feet.

"In the fifth district! I have lots of property there! Let me go—let me go!" and he darted past the chief of police like a madman, and rushed out into the street.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRINCE OF FIREMEN AT WORK.

The chief of police was left alone in the old miser's office after that individual fled in a panic in the direction of the fire. He glanced around the dingy little den and made a mental calculation as to its contents. An old safe, which had done duty for years, stood in one corner, and a high desk near a window in another.

Everything seemed to be in its place, from the big ledger to the pen on the desk.

"The old man is very methodical in his ways," remarked the chief. "No wonder he has grown rich, for everything he touches turns to gold. What will he do with it all when he is compelled to cross over into the next world? He can't take it with him, and yet he is evidently engaged in criminal devices to add to his wealth. He could live like a prince now on the income of his property. Yet he lives like a miser, hoarding his dollars as if he feared he would yet die in the poor house. Ah! there's a second alarm. That fire must be a big one. I ought to go and see that good order is kept. Yet, if I leave here now that old rascal may say I abstracted something from his office in his absence. I must go, though, and take the chances."

He left the office, closing and locking the door behind him, putting the key in his pocket. Then he hastened to the fire in the fifth district.

"Ah! it's the old rascal's block, after all!" exclaimed the chief, when he saw where the fire was. "He keeps well insured all the time, but still, part of the loss will fall on him. There he is now, tearing around like an old lunatic!"

The fire was rapidly devouring a row of frame houses belonging in part to the Seegar estate. There were ten houses in the row. Three of them were already wrapped in flames, and the others were threatened. To save the others the fourth and fifth were to be blown up.

The chief of the fire department so decided and ordered, and Joe Jeckel, the foreman of the "Red Apples," was told to do it.

The powder was quickly secured and carried into the fourth house. Old Solomon saw and understood the meaning of it.

He gave a yell, and, running up to Joe, seized him by the collar, and cried out:

"You are destroying instead of saving property. Take that

powder away! Take it away! You wish to destroy my property for revenge!"

"Get out of my way, old man," said Joe, "or I'll throw you into the fire."

"Take it away! Take it away!" the old man cried, growing more frantic every moment. He caught up a keg of powder at Joe's feet and ran away with it.

Joe ran after him, seized the keg and gave the old miser a blow that sent him reeling half way across the street.

"Murder! Murder!" yelled the old man.

The police ran up and took him away, leaving Joe free to do his duty.

A few moments later the house was blown up. The other followed, and the progress of the fire was checked.

The police carried the old miser to the station and locked him up in the same cell into which he had been instrumental in casting Joe. There he raved like a madman for an hour, declaring that the fire department had conspired to ruin him because of his having accused Joe of stealing his diamond.

"Shut up, old man," ordered the sergeant in charge of the station.

"I won't!" was the frantic reply. "I am being ruined. I'll sue the town. They are destroying my property."

An hour later the inquest over the dead body of Tom Truman was held at the police station.

Joe and Julia Thorne were present. Solomon Seegar was also sent for, and he came, trembling from head to foot.

"I don't see why you sent for me," he said to the coroner, as he entered the station. "What had I to do with his death?"

"That's what we want to find out," said the coroner. "I understand that he was in your employ when he was killed. Is that true?"

"No, sir. I had made an agreement with him to pay him a certain reward for the recovery of my diamonds and the conviction of the thief. I am willing to make that agreement with every man in this room. But that would not be taking them into my employ, would it?"

"Well, no, not in the fullest sense of the term," replied the coroner. "But there are witnesses present who swear that Tom Truman told them that you were paying him so much per month to hound down the man who killed him."

"I am not responsible for what Truman may have said. I made no such bargain with him."

"Then you know nothing about the cause of the killing?"

"Nothing whatever, further than what I had heard Truman say."

"Ah! what did he say?"

"He said that Jeckel had threatened to down him, and that he intended to be on his guard against him."

"Did he make any threats himself?" the coroner asked.

"No, except that he intended to be on his guard against him," was the reply.

"Do you think he had anything to do with the abduction of Miss Thorne?"

"No, I do not."

"That will do," said the coroner, and the old man stepped aside to allow another witness to take the chair.

Joe was called, and, in as few words as possible, told the story of the death of Truman.

"I had to kill him, or else be killed. I was not quite prepared to die," he said, "particularly when Julia was pleading for some one to save her."

"Who was the old woman who pursued her?" the coroner asked.

"I don't know. She made her escape while Truman and I were struggling with each other."

After many other questions, he was asked to step aside, and Julia Thorne was called.

Every eye was upon her. She was pale, but had a de-

termined gleam in her eyes. She began with the story of her abduction, and during its recital a pin dropping on the floor might have been heard. Suddenly she raised her voice, and, looking at Solomon Seegar, said:

"I know more to-day than I did yesterday, and am sure that Mr. Seegar knows all about the abduction."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD MISER WEAKENS.

Julia Thorne's words fell like a thunderclap on the coroner and spectators.

Solomon Seegar glared at her in dumfounded amazement. He could not for a moment or two realize what had struck him. He was conscious, however, that something bigger than a mountain had fallen on him. A death-like pallor overspread his leathery face, and big drops of cold perspiration stood like beads on his forehead.

"What do you mean, Miss Thorne?" the coroner asked, as soon as he could recover from his astonishment.

"I mean just what I say," she answered—"that Mr. Seegar knows all about the abduction."

"I—don't—know—anything—about it," gasped the miser.

"Yes, you do," said Julia. "I know you now, though not before."

Just then the old miser's lawyer arose to interfere, but was cut short by the clanging of the great fire bell.

Joe Jeckel sprang to his feet and made a break for one of the side windows of the station-house. There were too many men between him and the front door for him to make an exit that way. Nearly a score of other firemen were present, and their very rough and unceremonious way of leaving came near creating a panic in the room. Quite a number of people present thought the police station was on fire, and also joined in the mad rush to get outside the building.

So many left, including the principal witness, that the coroner was on the point of adjourning the inquest till next morning. But as all the facts of the killing had been reached, he resolved to settle the matter then and there. The result was a decision that the deceased lost his life in an attempt to kill Joseph Jeckel; that said Jeckel had killed said Truman in self-defense, and that in their opinion he was justified in so doing.

That ended the inquest, and a shout of applause went up from those who remained to hear the decision.

As soon as he could get away from the station-house old Seegar hastened to his office with his lawyer. There they shut themselves up in the dingy little den and remained closeted for hours.

In the meantime, since Joe had been called away to a fire, Julia Thorne had to return home alone. She was still at the Atherby mansion, a guest of Celia.

She was in a state of great excitement, and rushed into the house like one chased by fiends.

"Oh, Miss Atherby!" she cried, flinging herself in a chair and shivering as if convulsed by an ague. "The mystery is cleared up. I have found out who my abductor was."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Miss Atherby. "Who was it?"

Julia glanced around the room and saw the two servants present. She shook her head and said:

"I don't think I ought to say a word till I see a lawyer."

"You are quite right. I will send for my lawyer, and have him advise you."

The servants were sent out of the room, and then Julia sat on the sofa by the side of her benefactress, and told her a story that made that benevolent lady shiver with horror.

Celia Atherby sent for her lawyer, Mr. Hinton, and while

the messenger was gone the door bell rang. A servant responded, and a man asked if Miss Thorne were staying there.

"Yes, sir, she lives here," responded the maid.

"Be kind enough to hand her my card, and say that I desire to see her on important business for a few moments."

"Yes, sir. Walk in and be seated."

The girl showed him into the parlor, and then hastened to deliver the card to Julia with the stranger's message.

Julia took up the card and read:

SIMON BERNSTEIN,

Attorney-at-Law.

Appleton.

"Why, that's Mr. Seegar's lawyer!" she exclaimed, turning pale as a sheet.

"Don't get excited, dear," said Celia; "I'll go in and see what he wants. It may be that he bears an olive branch. Shall I go?"

"Oh, if you please! You are so kind and generous to me!"

"There, that will do. Just calm yourself, and I'll be back in a minute or two," and Celia left the room and repaired to the parlor.

As she entered, Bernstein arose and made a profound bow. He knew her well by sight.

"Pardon me for this intrusion, Miss Atherby," he said. "I come in the interest of peace and good will."

"I am not sure that I understand you," she replied, looking at his card, which she held in her hand. "You asked to see Miss Thorne, did you not?"

"Yes, I called to see her in the interest of my client."

"Who is your client?"

"Mr. Solomon Seegar."

"Oh!" and a sneer crept into the silvery voice of the beautiful woman.

"He sent me, not to talk about law, but peace. He wishes to have Miss Thorne say what he shall do to satisfy her so as to have matters drop where they are."

"Ah!" and Celia Atherby elevated her eyebrows. "He begs for mercy, does he?"

"He desires to compromise the matter, and have the subject dropped," said the lawyer.

"Yes; I understand. I will see Miss Thorne, and tell her what you have said," and Celia left the room and ran into the one where Julia was sitting near a window.

"Oh, Julia!" she exclaimed, as she embraced the young girl. "The old villain has sent his lawyer to ask what you will take to have the matter drop!"

"He has!"

"Yes—and he is waiting for your answer."

"Oh, I don't know what to say," said Julia.

"Do just as I say, and you'll never regret it," said Celia.

"I will be guided by you in every particular."

"Then tell him to bring his client here to-night. I will send for Mr. Jeckel, and then get him, instead of my lawyer, to demand twenty thousand dollars as the price of your silence, or rather as damages without suit."

Julia opened wide her eyes in amazement.

"You see, if you prosecute him, he will be sent to State prison," remarked Celia, "and he will pay that much rather than go to prison."

"Well, tell him to bring him here to-night, and I will let him know what I will do."

Celia returned to the parlor, and said to Bernstein:

"Miss Thorne is very much prostrated. She asks that you and your client call here at eight o'clock this evening, when she will see both of you."

Bernstein bowed himself out of the room, and left the house to join his client, who was waiting for him in his office.

"Well, what does she say?" Seegar eagerly asked, as the lawyer came in.

"She says that you and I must call together at Miss Atherby's at eight o'clock this evening, when she will see you and say what she will do."

The old miser groaned.

"Isn't that a trap?" he asked.

"I think not. Miss Atherby assured me that no other lawyer would be present. I think I can bluff them on law points."

"Well, I'd rather not meet her, but if you say so, I'll go."

"Of course you must go. There's no help for it; she has the trump card, and can crush you whenever she sees proper to throw it."

As soon as Bernstein left the Atherby mansion Celia Atherby sent off two messengers, one to tell her lawyer that he need not call, as she had changed her mind; the other bore a note to Joe Jeckel, and ran as follows:

"MR. JECKEL:—Please return with the bearer, and oblige your friend,
CELIA ATHERBY."

Joe was found at the fire engine house. He opened the note and read it with no little surprise.

"I am ready to go with you," he said to the messenger, after doffing his red shirt and fireman's hat.

When he reached the residence of Celia Atherby he found that lady and Julia Thorne waiting to receive him.

"Oh, Mr. Jeckel!" exclaimed Celia. "I have such a surprise for you!"

"Your note gave me one," he said. "I am at your service."

"Ah! I know you are, and I am proud to have you in my service. Do you know that Julia made a discovery at the inquest this morning that clears up the mystery of her abduction?"

"Indeed!"

"Yes. She will tell you all about it," and then they seated themselves for a confidential conversation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

When Joe Jeckel rose to leave the Atherby mansion an hour later both ladies accompanied him to the door.

"You understand now, Mr. Jeckel," said Celia, "that no fire alarm is to draw you away this evening. The affair is too important. We rely on you to bring the villain to terms."

"I shall cease to be a fireman for this evening, at least," he said; "for when I am near you ladies I am a poor moth, unable to get away from the light."

"Oh!" exclaimed both ladies. "That will do."

That evening Joe was on hand at the Atherby mansion when old Solomon Seegar and his lawyer arrived.

The old miser was staggered by seeing him enter the parlor.

"Good evening, Mr. Seegar," greeted Joe, making a very profound bow to the old miser. "I am glad to see you, and you too, Mr. Bernstein."

"I am not glad to see you," said the miser. "I came to see Miss Thorne and——"

"Yes, and Miss Thorne sent for me to come and sit opposite your lawyer while she and you talked over matters."

Bernstein turned to Miss Atherby and said:

"We are disappointed. We did not expect this."

"Mr. Jeckel has our confidence in this matter," Miss Atherby replied.

"But he has not our confidence," urged the lawyer.

"Oh, that's no matter," interrupted Joe. "I don't want your confidence. I have your secret. That is enough."

Both lawyer and client turned pale.

They whispered together for a minute or two, and then the lawyer said:

"Let it be. We shall not object."

Then all five seated themselves around a table, and a deep silence fell upon the little party, which was finally broken by the lawyer.

"Miss Thorne," he said, "Mr. Seegar acknowledges that he has done you a wrong, for which he is very sorry. He is aware that you can recover damages for the abduction and consequent detention, and is willing to pay without litigation, if you will name a reasonable sum and sign an agreement that you have no charge to prefer against him."

"Yes, he has done me a very great wrong indeed," said Julia. "I was seized and——"

"Never mind about repeating the story," interrupted the lawyer. "We will agree to all that. Just say how much you think you ought to have for what you have suffered. If one thousand dollars will——"

"Oh, no! One thousand dollars will not do," said Julia, very firmly.

"How much, then?"

"I shall let Mr. Jeckel say how much I ought to have."

"I—I object!" gasped Seegar.

"Mr. Jeckel once saved my life at the risk of his own," said Julia, "and afterward rescued me from your clutches. I have asked him to name the sum I ought to have."

"Well, how much do you say?" demanded the lawyer. "Let us know, and be done with it."

"Twenty thousand dollars in good cash," replied Joe, very coolly.

"I won't pay it," hissed the old miser.

"No; it's an outrage—blackmail!" exclaimed Bernstein.

Bernstein dared not provoke the "Prince of Firemen" further, and sat down again, squirming uneasily on his chair.

Seegar was boiling over with rage.

"I won't pay it," he said, repeating it a dozen times.

"Yes, you will," said Joe. "You will pay every dollar of it, or go to jail when you leave the front stoop of this house."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bernstein.

"I mean that the offense is a State prison one, and for a long term at that. He will pay that sum or go to jail and stand trial."

"I—I—defy you!" hissed the old man. "I'll give two thousand dollars. Not a cent more."

"Very well. You may go. I have nothing more to say," and Joe arose as a signal that the conference was at an end.

Celia and Julia arose also.

"The officers outside the door await you, Solomon Seegar," said Joe. "Go, and may you get your just deserts in the courts of law."

"I won't pay it! I won't pay it! Come on, Bernstein."

They took their hats and made for the door.

On the stoop they were dumfounded at seeing two well-known constables waiting for them.

Seegar gave a gasp, and staggered back inside the door, white as a sheet.

"What's the matter?" Joe asked. "Why don't you go on? We have no further use for you here."

"I—I'll give five thousand dollars," hoarsely whispered the old villain.

Joe chuckled.

"Multiply it by four, old man," said he. "I've got charge of this thing, and I am prejudiced against you, recollect."

"I—I—can't do it. I haven't half that much money," pleaded the old rascal.

"That settles it, then. Get out now, or I'll call the officers in, and order them to take you out."

"Will you take ten thousand dollars?"

"No—twenty thousand dollars or nothing," was the defiant reply. "You had better decide at once. Will you pay it or not?" and Joe took hold of the door knob as if about to open the door to admit the two officers.

"Yes!" and the old man dropped into a chair and groaned in the depths of his soul.

"Then write a check for the amount. The detectives will watch you till the check is cashed. You see I am more than a match for both you and your lawyer."

The old miser groaned again, but filled up the check and signed it, for all that.

"Now sign this agreement," said the lawyer, producing a paper he had prepared.

"Not till the check is cashed," said Joe.

They were obliged to submit, and went away, Joe having signaled the officers to allow them to go.

The check was cashed next day and Julia signed an agreement not to prosecute.

Joe Jeckel chuckled as he handed the old man the paper, and said:

"You see I am catching up with you, old man. I am not done with you yet. If you wish to keep the fact that you have a deserted wife and four children in Manchester, England, concealed, you had better leave Appleton at once, or else transfer half of your property to them. Miss Thorne happened to recognize the picture of Solomon Segur as that of Seegar. Twenty years makes many changes, but not enough to hide you behind their wrinkles. I have been following you up, and the ocean cable gave me the points."

The old miser and his lawyer went away wiser but sadder than when they came.

A week later he disappeared from Appleton after having quietly sold all his property, and was never heard of there again.

A year later Julia received news from England that Charlie, her lover, had been found a captive to an African king, and that a ransom of \$1,000 would secure his liberty. She quickly sent the money, and six months later he landed in Appleton, a handsome, sun-browned fellow. His story created a deep interest in every household.

Preparations for their marriage went on. One day Julia whispered to Joe that if he asked Celia Atherby to be his wife she would gladly consent.

"I know that she loves you," she said, "and I suspect that you love her."

"I do," said Joe, "but I dared not hope in that quarter."

Joe did ask her.

"Yes," she said. "You are the hero I've been looking for all these years;" and she sealed her troth with a kiss.

Joe Jeckel is now the richest man in Appleton, but he is the friend of the red-shirted boys, and the PRINCE OF FIREMEN.

THE END.

Read "THE BOY RAILROAD KING; OR, FIGHTING FOR A FORTUNE," which will be the next number (100) of "Pluck and Luck."

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